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ROBERT STOOD AND KISSED HILDEGARDE'S HAIR, AND DREW HER HAND WITHIN HIS ARM PROTECTIVELY.

HIS TRUE WORTH.

CHAPTER I.

It was a valley, rich in green pastures, with the sheltering hills sloping upward on every side, and a shallow stream flowing through the heart of it.

The village of Drummerfield lay in this valley—there were some, indeed, who called it a "town;" a village boasting a neat level High Street, and a water-cart in the dog-days. At one end of the little town stood the ivy-clad church; with three cracked bells in its square Norman tower, and a glinting weather-vane on the top of it.

Some seven miles or so from Drummerfield was the real county town of Prince's Wroughton.

On the green hillside, overlooking the tranquil valley, stood, in the midst of its neglected parkland, a large mansion, lonely and desolate-looking, and surrounded by a weedy moat that was generally dry.

The roof was heavily gabled; the tall chimney stacks were gaunt and crooked; the diamond-

paned windows, with their clumsy time-worn fastenings, which rattled so noisily whenever the wind swept up from the valley, were set deeply into walls all stained with the grim weather marks of centuries.

For the Moat House, as the place was called, was very old, and very memorable too. Brave Queen Bess and her dames of high degree were said to have passed a night there on their way to the revels at historic Kenilworth.

It was a gloomy old house, silent and full of mysterious shadow, dark with carved oak panelling, and with creaking oaken floors. An old house with many parlours, opening mostly one into the other; the ceilings of them beamed and low, and the windows of them deeply seated and cushioned, and flanked with huge cumbersome shutters.

In the rear of the house there was a hilly wilderness of a garden: a few flowers growing and flourishing there in the summer-time—but they were of the hardy, old-world kind and needed no tending to speak of.

A bent and aged gardener, however, was sometimes to be seen in the shrubberies, raking and sweeping here and there in a preoccupied, aimless

sort of way, amongst the weeds and brambles and the dead leaves of a bygone year.

At a remote corner of the garden, and just separated from it by the dreary moat—that damp abode of croaking frogs, and loathsome reptiles that haunted the rotten, crumbling brickwork—there was a small paddock, barren and deserted enough, with two or three dilapidated, half-rotted sheds, which for years had been the sport of the wind and the rain, and occasionally the refuge of the nightjars and the owls that screamed over the neglected garden.

And at the back of these broken sheds a group of shivering poplars reared themselves skyward, seeming to touch the sad heavens in the twilight. One of these tall trees, at some forgotten time in the past, had been blasted downward by a lightning stroke; yet, withered and gray and bare as it was, it still stood there, whispering and shivering with its companions, waiting perchance until another stroke should stretch it low in the grass.

And that, alas! was all the land appertaining now to the Moat House—some fifty acres or so of barren parkland, the empty paddock and the garden! There had been a time when things were

different—ay, different indeed—a time when almost the whole of Drummerfield village, and the fertile lands surrounding it, had belonged in natural birthright to the owners of the old mansion, and when a St. Austell had been called lord of the manor. But that, now, was a hundred years ago or more; and, whatever the St. Austells of Drummerfield might have been in those times, it was generally well known round about them, indeed an open secret, that they were poor enough in all conscience at the present day—as poor as rooks, or church mice, their neighbours all said, by whom nevertheless they were regarded with respect. They might be an unlucky family; all the same, they were a noble one, and their blood was of the bluest.

Nobody could tell exactly how or when their broad acres had gradually slipped from them, except that mortgage and high play had had a good deal to do with it—the reckless wild living, in brief, of the lords who were dead and gone.

And two only now remained of the fine old stock, one of whom lived her forlorn existence all the long year round without change at the Moat House. This was Lady St. Austell, the present Lord St. Austell's widowed mother, who had never since her marriage been a healthy and vigorous woman.

She was in these days a confirmed invalid, stricken down with an incurable apical malady, having lain, almost entirely helpless, in an upper chamber of the great old house for the past four years or more, watched over and waited upon untiringly throughout that time by her adopted daughter, Georgie Walmer, who, at the death of her parents, had been sent over from India to Lady St. Austell as a sacred charge from a long-lost friend.

Lady St. Austell, in her youth, had loved well the mother of Georgie Walmer; and it was for that mother's sake that she had welcomed so gladly the young girl herself, soon growing to think of the orphan as a real daughter of her own.

Georgie was scarcely five years old when she had landed in England; and now she was nearly twenty-one. Her affection for her friend and guardian, was as boundless as her gratitude. Lady St. Austell, indeed, was the girl's closest friend and mother in one. And Georgie now, was only too thankful to be of service in the sick-room. She could do something at last, she thought, towards repaying this second mother for all her goodness and unstinted affection.

Thus, in the sick-room, where Georgie was ever to be found at her post, her patience never failed, her gentleness and devotion were unvarying, her sympathy was ever ready in fullest measure. Her grateful, clinging nature was such that in this well-doing it could know no weariness, and her labour was a labour of infinite love and tenderness.

It was a calm, sultry evening in June, and the hour was that of sunset. The windows of Lady St. Austell's chamber were open to the warm west breeze that came stealing up from the valley, and floated in, scented with the perfume of the distant hayfields.

The great room, furnished partly like a sitting-room, was panelled from floor to ceiling, and the heavy furniture it contained was both old and ugly.

But the dull room was brightened everywhere with bowls and nosegays of sweet old-fashioned flowers that Georgie Walmer herself had culled from the wild and weedy garden in the rear of the house.

Lady St. Austell was raised upon the pillows, her worn, yet once beautiful face as weary-looking as it was wont to be.

Her hair, prematurely gray, was crowned gracefully with a lace cap, with broad lappets. In age she was scarcely fifty, but she looked quite ten years older.

By the open window sat Georgie, with a book upon her knee—a slender, white-robed figure, with a knot of lilies at her bosom. One rarely called her lovely; but her features, in a general way, attracted the attention of all by reason of their sweetness in expression; her eyes were soft and trustful, and gentle as the eyes of a dove.

In her clear, low voice she was reading one of

Longfellow's saddest poems. Lady St. Austell delighted in poetry—as a rule she cared little for prose—for good poetry, if well read, would sometimes soothe her into slumber; and sleep to the sufferer, at any time, meant ease and freedom from pain.

"Darling, I'm tired of it!" came the rather peevish interruption. "Somehow it makes me feel wretched this evening—*Evangeline* is too sad. Let us have something else, Georgie."

The young girl looked up with her patient, sweet smile.

"Of course, if you wish it," she answered, brightly. "And what shall it be, dear mother?"

It was her custom to call Lady St. Austell by that cherished and sacred name. For Georgie had done so even when a little child.

"You must decide for me, darling," the invalid murmured, still in the rather peevish intonation that Georgie knew so well, and was so patient with, too, wistful. "Do you remember what it was that you were reading last night? I liked it—but I forget."

"Ah, yes!" Georgie said. "It was the 'Courtship of Miles Standish.' She turned the leaves of her volume, with a quick soft hand. "Shall we go on with it now, dear mother?" she asked.

"Please, Georgie."

"And are you quite easy, quite comfortable?"

"As usual, Georgie. How can I expect to be anything else. I am listening."

The young girl cleared her voice again; whilst the scent of the distant hayfields was wafted in, commingled with the breath of the flowery valley hedge-rows.

This kind of life would have been insufferably irksome to a nature less unworldly than that of Georgie Walmer; and any other than she might have been emphatically miserable at the lonely and impoverished Moat House.

But Georgie, in her own way, contrived to be tolerably happy. Not even within herself did she ever rebel against the uneventful, joyless existence that she passed with Lady St. Austell.

"It was here that we left off yesterday," Georgie said, "was it not?"

Over him rushed, like a whirl that is keen and cold and relentless,

Thoughts of what might have been, and the weight and woe of his errand;

All the dreams that had faded, and all the hopes that had vanished;

All his life henceforth a dreary and tenantless mansion.

Haunted by vain regrets, and pallid, sorrowful faces.

Still he said to himself, and almost fiercely he said it,—

"Let not him that putteth his hand to the plough look backwards;

Though the ploughshare cut through the flowers of life to its fountains,

Though it pass o'er the graves of the dead and the hearts of the living,

It is the will of—

When the room door opened abruptly, and a man came in, as if to illustrate, as it were, to a certain extent in the flesh, the words which had so lately fallen from the lips of Georgie Walmer.

He was a stalwart, well-made man of perhaps some thirty years, the striking beauty of the dark face marred by the discontented, restless expression which of late had become habitual to it. His mouth, which in truth was somewhat stern and cruel looking, was hidden by a crisp short beard; though his eyes occasionally could be kindly and pleasant enough when that cloud of discontent was banished transiently from his brow.

This was Ughtred, Lord St. Austell, twelfth Baron of his line; Lady St. Austell's only son. The Moat House was his own, and his home too; but, for all that, he hated it thoroughly, fiercely—hated it for its poverty, and for its dreary ugliness and barrenness which, as yet, he was powerless to render otherwise.

Until recently Drummerfield had seen very little of him; for during the past five or six years he had chosen to lead the life of a wanderer, getting rid, after his own fashion, of a great deal more money than he could afford to spend, and roundly cursing his ill-luck, as he was pleased to term it, at the same time.

There was but one path open to him—one

chance, one worldly move on the chessboard of life that alone could relieve the fallen fortunes of his house; and that one step was—a wealthy marriage.

Lord St. Austell himself knew perfectly well that this last expedient was his only means of salvation. And he was on the very brink of the plunge, as it were, already; that is to say, he had accepted, had acquiesced in, the worldly alternative.

He had just now come up from his solitary wine-drinking in the old oak dining-room below. Lady St. Austell herself dined in the middle of the day; and Georgie Walmer, as a rule, shared the meal with her adopted mother.

At the entrance of her son Lady St. Austell had looked up eagerly; but the eyes of Georgie were dropped on the page of *Miles Standish*.

"Ughtred, is that you?"

"Yes, mother. I'm off to Courtgardens, of course, and just stepped up to see you for a moment before I start. Georgie," turning to her—"you shouldn't read in the twilight; you'll ruin your eyes."

She only smiled; but the hot colour had risen to either cheek, and her heart was thumping tumultuously.

Poor little faithful Georgie!

"You walk there, I suppose, Ughtred?" his mother inquired.

"Yes," he replied idly, "the stroll over, you know, is pleasant on an evening."

"You always start so late, to my thinking, Ughtred," Lady St. Austell remarked, querulously; "and in many ways, I think, you are hardly fair to Hildegard Ray."

"Am I not? Well, goodnight," he said abruptly, turning away.

"Be sure you give my love to Hildegard," Lady St. Austell called after him—and Ughtred halted for a moment—and remind her that she has not been to see me lately. Ask her to come and see me soon."

"All right—I'll tell her," was the careless reply; then he added with more gentleness and courtesy—"By the way, mother mine, I should have inquired how you are this evening. Easier, I hope."

Lady St. Austell sighed.

"There is no difference—at least, I feel none," she murmured sadly. "Please do not forget to give my love to Hildegard. Do you hear, Ughtred?"

"Of course," impatiently. "Goodnight little Georgie."

"Goodnight Ughtred."

And then he was gone; and the summer twilight to Georgie Walmer seemed all of a sudden to have grown closer and darker. She knew that she could no longer see to read *Miles Standish*; but something more than the gloaming was dimming and obscuring her vision now.

"It is dark," she said, almost tremulously. "Shall we have the lamps, dear mother?"

"Yes, if you like. Oh, Georgie!" with sudden passionate feeling—"what a merciful thing it is for us that he has learned to love Hildegard Ray! I have so hoped and prayed that he might win her—she is so rich; rich and beautiful together, exactly what Ughtred should have in a wife. He could not have made a wiser choice; and then, when he is married to her, he will never want to roam the world again. And think—only think what her money will be able to do for the Moat House! How thankful we should be, Georgie, you and I, darling, to know that there is a certainty of his settling down quietly at last!"

Georgie could tell by her intonation that Lady St. Austell was expecting some sort of comment or reply; and so, as the young girl was occupied at a distant table, lighting a large shaded lamp there, with her face turned from the bed, she was brave enough to essay one; and her voice faltered not at all.

"Indeed, I am very thankful," said Georgie gently.

"Yes," exclaimed Lady St. Austell fervently, clasping her thin jewelled hands upon the coverlet, "I thank Heaven, with heart and soul, that he is going to marry Hildegard Ray!"

CHAPTER II.

SITUATED about three quarters of a mile or so from the village of Drummerfield, and lying well back from the high road which led to Prince's Wroughton, there was a large country house called Courtgardens.

It was of comparatively modern architecture, and built of dull red brick—square and most substantial of aspect.

An avenue of chestnuts led up from the principal lodge to the front entrance of Courtgardens—the home of the great heiress, Hildegard Ray, the promised bride of Ughtred Lord St. Austell.

It was a perfectly well-known fact in the county that the late owner and master of Courtgardens had amassed in trade the large fortune which he had bequeathed to his only child; and consequently there had been no slight amount of unpleasantness in the exclusive neighbourhood of Drummerfield at the time that Courtgardens was purchased and refurnished on a grand and magnificent scale throughout, and Reuben Ray first came to settle there as a landed proprietor and a country gentleman of leisure.

For a long time the neighbourhood held out steadily against having anything whatever to do with the Manchester man of commerce, his gentle, delicate wife, who looked every inch a lady, and the one little daughter with the German name, whom they had brought from the north with them.

Indeed Mrs. Ray herself was of German extraction, a native of Erfurt, and hence her daughter's name.

But soon the rumour spread that the newcomers were fabulously rich, of princely wealth in fact, and the natural result followed as long as it invariably does in social instances of the kind. In due course "those Rays" were looked upon as actual county folk and fellow Christians, and their objectionable mushroom origin and presumption in settling at Courtgardens were affected to be forgotten.

When Miss Ray was in her eighteenth year, her father was killed through a fall in the hunting-field, and the shock of his tragic end was the death-knell of his loving and delicate wife. She followed Reuben Ray before the year was out. And then it was that their beautiful daughter Hildegard found herself left alone in the world, sole mistress of splendid Courtgardens and fifty thousand a-year.

At Hildegard's request, her earnest invitation, a homely, matter-of-fact, though withal lovable old relative on her father's side came to live with her and chaperon her after the death of her parents—a maiden cousin, she was in reality, some three or four times removed, by name Miss Arabella Trott. This little old lady still lived with Hildegard at Courtgardens, and was much beloved by the poorer and needier inhabitants of Drummerfield by reason of her charitable qualities and homely, Samaritan-like ways—propensities, indeed, which had always been encouraged by generous Hildegard Ray herself.

In her exalted position as a great heiress, Miss Ray was naturally besieged by a whole army of adores and would-be suitors for her favour. But Hildegard's horror was intense and deep-rooted, lest she might be sought out and wooed, and perchance unwittingly won, for the sake of her great fortune alone—the fortune which Miss Arabella Trott often declared that her young friend and kinswoman estimated by far too lightly.

So at eight-and-twenty the mistress of Courtgardens was still Hildegard Ray, though engaged to be married, at last, to Lord St. Austell of the Moat House.

The engagement at the present time was only of a few months' standing. Nearly a year before, when Ughtred Lord St. Austell had returned to Drummerfield from one of his erratic sojournings abroad, he had no more intention of wooing Hildegard Ray than he had of marrying Miss Arabella Trott herself. He had certainly arrived at the conclusion that he must marry somebody—and marry wisely also; that, indeed, was rendered imperative by circumstances; but somehow he had never dreamed of the heiress of

Courtgardens as the woman he might win perhaps for the trying.

His thoughts on the subject of a rich wife being vague and shadowy in the extreme, they had gone wandering farther afield. He did not exactly want to marry a woman he could not love; but he needed money, and money he must have; and the one thing, it seemed, was not to be obtained without doing the other, unfortunately.

Nor was it that Ughtred St. Austell was in the least degree calculating and dishonourable by nature; only bitter with himself, as it were, and the world he lived in. His faith was strong in the good things of this life; he scorned the bare notion of happiness without them.

It was Lady St. Austell, his mother, who had in the first instance suggested that he should marry Hildegard Ray; and then he marvelled at his own stupidity in that he had not thought of Hildegard before!

Having of late years been so seldom at the Moat House, the old home he hated for its gloom and its poverty, Lord St. Austell had always seemed to Hildegard little better than the most ordinary stranger. But this latest stay of his in Drummerfield had proved to be an unusually lengthy one, and thus it came to pass that he and Hildegard met more frequently than they had ever done before at the social entertainments of mutual friends and neighbours.

Lord St. Austell was very much in earnest—he had made up his mind to win Hildegard Ray. He was clever, clear-sighted, and his will was strong, and so he won her in the end; not however by flattery, gifts, and shallow, extravagant love-making, but by constant and very ordinary kindnesses, by patient solicitude and quiet, man-like courtesy.

The proud, sensitive, sceptical Hildegard, who heretofore had sent so many suitors hopelessly and unceremoniously from her presence, suspecting and mistrusting their integrity, now smiled favourably on Lord St. Austell.

With a woman's strange capriciousness she trusted and believed in him implicitly; for to her he did not seem in the least like other men. Somehow she could not accredit him with base and mercenary motives, as she had accredited—and perhaps unjustly so—those other wooers before him. He was infinitely too proud and noble-hearted, she told herself tranquilly, to be capable either of meanness or ungodliness.

She was perfectly aware, like the rest of her neighbours, that Ughtred St. Austell was very poor; poor indeed for his position; and she longed to enrich him with the wealth she wanted not; she valued it now, indeed, only for his sake—to cast it all down at his feet for acceptance, as a simple proof of her trust and her love.

He had succeeded, absolutely, in touching her heart, and she would never doubt him for the world. Women at eight-and-twenty do not lightly love; more especially if, like Hildegard, they have never loved before.

On this warm, still, bay-scented June evening, when Lord St. Austell had told his mother that he was going to Courtgardens, Hildegard was expecting him.

She was standing—her dress a rich white silk, with yellow roses at her throat, and a diamond comb in her hair—amongst the brilliant flower-beds on the wide soft sloping lawn in front of the drawing-room windows. She was gazing, with a tender smile upon her lips, in the direction of the chestnut avenue, up which he would come from the lodge-gates.

Here was a queenly figure combined with an attractive face—a really beautiful face, serene, refined, and thoughtful; with large, steadfast, gray-black eyes—those eyes of Irish gray—and a smooth, wide white brow.

In graceful fashion—a fashion all her own, and peculiar to herself—she wore her soft and abundant raven hair woven and coiled around the diamond comb.

Her grand, Junoesque figure was perhaps just a trifle too fully developed; but then Hildegard Ray could no longer be considered in the first blush of youth, with her nine-and-twentieth birthday drawing near.

The great centre window in the drawing-room opened on the lawn; and by this window there sat a sprightly looking little old lady, with a bunch of short, tight, iron-gray curls flattened on either side of her face, and a smart cap surmounting them. Her spectacles rested on her nose, and she was sewing busily.

This was Miss Arabella Trott, commonly called "Aunt Bella" by Hildegard, for the sake of brevity and convenience.

A clock somewhere in the house chimed the half-hour after eight. Hildegard at the same moment looked at her watch.

"He is late again," she said to herself. "I wish that he would come to me a little earlier and a little oftener—sometimes."

And a sigh escaped her involuntarily—a pensive look shadowed the glorious gray eyes.

"Hildegard," called out Aunt Bella, in her quick treble voice, "I have just finished this flannel wrapper for Mrs. Parker's baby, and I want the poor soul to have it this evening, as the small mite is ailing. I promised her she should. So, my dear, you won't mind my running down into the village with it, will you? I shall soon be back, and you can give Lord St. Austell his coffee without me, you know."

Hildegard Ray strolled slowly up to the window, and the little old lady rose then from her seat and shook out the blue flannel wrapper, herring-boned and bound with white, which was destined for Mrs. Parker's sickly infant.

"Cannot Mrs. Parker wait until to-morrow?" said Hildegard, with her calm smile. "Is will be quite dark before you reach home again, Aunt Bella; and besides—"

"That won't matter a bit," put in Miss Bella, in her quick short way. "I never mind summer darkness. And I want particularly, also, to call in at Dr. Hobson's and give Richard a serious talking to. I shall just catch him at home if I go now. Do you know, Hildegard, I don't believe he understands properly that rather complicated case of Nancy Brown's—his present treatment of her, I feel certain, has been altogether wrong from the first. A pretty scandal, indeed, would there be for Drummerfield, if my own nephew, Richard Falkland, were to go and poison Nancy Brown through ignorance and inexperience."

"Richard is by far too clever and careful to commit any error of the kind," Hildegard answered, gravely. "Nancy Brown is a very old woman; she cannot in reason expect to get well in a week."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Aunt Bella, "there can be no harm in my telling Richard exactly what I think of the matter. And there's that disreputable Polly Hayes—I must be after her too. I never met her like, I declare! Really, Hildegard, the gross ingratitude of the lower orders is in these days something appalling!"

Miss Arabella Trott listened from the room, and Hildegard turned her anxious gaze again towards the lodge and the chestnut avenue. Then she saw him coming and went to meet him.

"You are a little later than usual, dear, are you not?" she said gently, with just a suspicion, perhaps, of reproach in her voice, though there was no shadow of it discernible in those loving, gray, grave eyes of hers, as they came together under the fragrant chestnut boughs. "I have been watching for you, indeed, since eight o'clock. You promised me yesterday that you would be with me at eight, Ughtred."

He shrugged his shoulders, half unconsciously, but in true French style. Hildegard noticed the movement, and it pained her.

"Did I really?" he returned carelessly. "Ah, yes, of course, I remember now! But you will forgive me, I know—I hadn't an idea how the time was slipping away. Let me make amends, Hildegard. I will come and dine with you to-morrow; may I?"

"May you!" she echoed, with a lovely smile, full of adoration and trust.

Then he stooped and kissed her hair, and drew her hand within his arm protectingly. She only smiled again—her own grave tender smile—and a happier light came into her eyes.

She did not doubt the truth of his word, she

had never doubted his honour, only she yearned for a little more tenderness on his part sometimes, and a little less of indifference.

He never had been an ardent, a demonstrative lover, she knew; it was not in his nature so to be, she thought; yet now that he had won her, and his wooing was crowned with success, she certainly caught herself fancying sometimes that his manner was colder and a shade more reserved than in those past other days before she had given him her promise and her surrender was complete.

"You are not angry with me, I trust?" he said, a trifle anxiously, bending downward his dark head again and just brushing once more her hair with his beard.

"Oh, I never could be angry with you, Ughtred," she answered earnestly. "No—I was growing rather weary of waiting and watching for you, that was all. I had begun to fear that you were not coming. My Ughtred, I am content now."

Yes—close to him, tall and dark and stalwart, with her hand resting against his side—she was happy now, as she told him. To him her forgiveness was ever ready; it was so easy to pardon anything, no matter what the iniquity, when he was with her.

The night was exceeding fair, so they did not go indoors, as Hildegard was fond of wandering about her own beautiful grounds when Ughtred came to Courtgardens of an evening, and of talking with him the while of his invalid mother, whom she loved for her lover's sake.

On one side of the house, where the lawn was mossy and undulating, there was a dense grove of larches, a favourite haunt of the nightingale that was already trilling its liquid song in the twilight. Up in the purple sky a silver star was twinkling wanly, whilst the moon in its neighbourhood was but young as yet, and scarcely more than a crescent.

The time passed swiftly—all too swiftly—at least for Hildegard Ray.

Going in presently, Hildegard and Lord St. Austell discovered that Aunt Bella had returned from her excursion into the village. The long drawing-rooms were brilliantly lighted, and Miss Arabella Trott was perched behind her tea-table. Lord St. Austell shook hands with her languidly, and then dropped into the nearest chair. Privately he considered Aunt Bella commonplace and bad form, but he was decently civil to her for Hildegard's sake.

And privately Miss Trott thought Ughtred St. Austell infinitely inferior to her dear Hildegard in every way, and inwardly stigmatised him, too, as priggish, conceited, selfish, and overbearing, albeit he possessed a grand handle to his name, and could boast a pedigree that dated perhaps from the Conquest.

In brief, secretly, there was no love lost between these two.

Even as he sipped his tea and chatted dutifully with Hildegard, he was thinking more of her fortune than of Hildegard herself—and perhaps Aunt Bella knew it. Who shall determine?

"She must indeed be rich," ran insensibly the thoughts of Ughtred St. Austell as he stared unseeing into the calm, beautiful face, with its gracious love-lit eyes.

"She lives here so quietly, so simply, with this old woman, she cannot spend a quarter of her fifty thousand a year."

He remembered then, with a sudden pang of mixed pride and bitterness, his own empty coffers, his own utter unworthiness; and at the moment he almost hated Hildegard Ray for the wealth she would bring to him on her wedding-morn.

The best looking and the largest house in the Drummerfield High Street was unquestionably the residence of Dr. Hobson.

There was a broad gateway on one side of it, and commodious stabling at the back.

The three rows of windows in the front were neat and shining and spotless always; for the doctor's spouse was an energetic housewife and an excellent manager in every way, dearly loving

the smell of soap and water, and the homely sound of the scrubbing-brush.

She had no children, thank goodness, to plague her mortal life out, as she often and loudly declared, and so—as is frequently the case with such women—the greater part of her time was devoted to harassing the maids and "looking after" the house, the spick and span condition of which had long since become proverbial amongst the Drummerfield ladies of her acquaintance.

There was a side door to Dr. Hobson's commodious dwelling-house which opened direct into the surgery; and exactly opposite to this side entry stood a red and green lamp, bearing on each one of its four coloured sides the word "Dispensary" in white letters—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, this, to the village urchins when lighted after dark.

The large surgery-window—which was perhaps a trifle less spotless than its fellows—was darkened about half way up by a thick wire-blind, over which Richard Falkland was accustomed to nod cheerily to his friends in the street when mixing up his prescriptions at the dispensary counter.

Richard Falkland was the only son of his mother; and she, a widow, was the only surviving sister of Miss Arabella Trott, the friend and chaperon of the rich Miss Ray.

Richard had come to Drummerfield during the past winter, fresh from some rather tough examinations at St. Thomas's, which he had passed with brilliant honours.

He came to Drummerfield for two reasons; first, because Dr. Hobson had found himself in want of a clever young assistant to whom he might with safety intrust the lighter and less important work; and secondly, because his mother's sister, Aunt Bella, lived in the neighbourhood, and he thought that he should like to be near her.

In fact, it was Aunt Bella herself who, knowing that Richard was resting at home after his recent successful labours, and at the same time was looking for a start in his profession, had written and told him of Dr. Hobson's vacant berth, having previously spoken to the doctor himself concerning her nephew's undoubted merit and ability.

Everyone in Drummerfield, by this time, had learned to like Richard Falkland; even the beautiful Hildegard Ray was sincerely interested in Aunt Bella's nephew, cordially telling the little old lady to invite him to Courtgardens whenever she pleased.

And although Richard Falkland had dwelt but a few months in Drummerfield, already had he met his fate—a fate which to poor Dick seemed of the sternest and cruellest order; a fate which, as he told himself with all due humility, must remain inexorable to the end.

Yet, with a hopeless secret locked away in his breast, Richard contrived to be cheerful and sweet-tempered enough before the world; and not one of those who loved and respected him for his worth guessed how sore was the heart within him.

It was a hot and sunny morning at the beginning of July, and the water-cart had just gone rumbling down the High Street. The hands of the surgery clock pointed to half-past ten.

Richard, at one end of the counter, with a gas-jet flaring in his eyes, was sealing up and directing bottles of physic; and the doctor himself, at the other end, his red face and bald head shining with perspiration, was pounding away with a small pestle and mortar.

Dr. Hobson, having finished his pounding, mopped his glistening forehead with a violet-silk pocket-handkerchief.

"There, that's done, thank goodness!" said he, with a sigh of relief. "See that the powders go round to the Vicarage before twelve o'clock, Falkland, or they will be sending up here for them."

"All right," answered Dick, with a cheery nod, as he lifted for an instant his bright brown eyes from the stick of sealing wax he was holding to the gas. "There's the gig, sir, come round."

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated the doctor, for the second time, bustling about, the heat notwithstanding, and wiping his hands in the long

moist towel which hung there upon its roller behind the surgery-door.

"By the way, there's Lady St. Austell's cooling-mixture," Richard said, remembering that Dr. Hobson would be passing the dilapidated creaked gates of the Moat House—"won't you take it with you, sir? The boy has his hands full this morning."

"Ah, yes, then, I may as well," agreed the doctor; and he took the bottle in its neat white sealed wrapper from Falkland's hand. "I must call and see her, too, on my way home; though 'tis little enough that I, or anyone else, can do for her now, poor soul," he added, shaking his head.

And then he went out into the hot morning sunshine, climbed into his gig, and drove briskly away on his rounds.

Richard Falkland, left alone, pulled down the window at the top, and began to whistle softly to himself. His hands were still busy, but his thoughts were yet busier.

"I wonder when they will ask me to Courtgardens again," he was musing. "It seems ages since I was there last; and yet in reality it is scarcely a fortnight ago! But she doesn't know, she never will in this world, how infinitely kinder and wiser it would have been if she had never recognised my existence, and had withheld her gracious smiles altogether. Good heavens, what a fool I have been—what a presumptuous, thoughtless, miserable fool! And yet—and yet I have not the moral strength to keep away when they bid me come! The temptation is too great—the prospect is too sweet—and I cannot resist it. I have one consolation nevertheless—the secret of my folly is my own, thank Heaven!"

Though his thoughts were troubled, he whistled on cheerily still; and though, too, his bright brown eyes were sad and shadowed just then, there was yet a smile, half humorous, half tender, about his sweet-tempered mouth.

Suddenly he ceased in the middle of his tune, and listened intently.

Everything was very still out of doors. The hot silence was broken only by the buzzing of a blue-bottle behind the wire-blind, together with the subdued sound of the domestic scrubbing-brush working away incessantly in some upper room of the doctor's house.

But Dick's quick ears could hear something else—the far-off roll of carriage-wheels coming rapidly towards the village along the dusty high-road.

With a nervous hand Richard Falkland put back into its place upon a shelf a purple jar, a few drachms of the contents of which he had lately required, and then he took up his station at the extreme end of the dispensary counter where he could see well out of the window, sideways fashion, over the dingy wire blind.

The roll of the carriage-wheels drew nearer and nearer, and faster and faster beat the foolish heart of Richard Falkland—he knew the sound so well!

Soon Miss Ray's carriage—she was not driving her spirited cream-coloured ponies to-day—came into view; her magnificent dark-green carriage and raven-black horses.

This warm summer morning it was wide open of course, and Hildegard herself was lying back upon the cushions, alone, looking so sweet and calm, so wholly and superbly beautiful, that the hot blood rushed swiftly up into poor Richard's face and dyed it for the moment a living crimson.

He had no desire nor intention to be seen there himself, but Hildegard Ray was too quick for him.

From beneath the deep lace of her sunshade she glanced at the surgery window; and catching sight of the young man's brown head above the top of the blind, just as he was in the very act, indeed, of drawing away from it, she bowed to him directly with her lovely smile, which poor Dick, in a blind spasmodic sort of fashion, somehow contrived to acknowledge and return; and then, unutterably wretched and deathly pale, he leaned heavily for support against the framework of the window. All his colour was gone, and his usually bright eyes were dim.

"She is going to the Moat House," he mut-

tered aloud—"she is going to the man she loves! Since I may love you and worship you only in secret—oh, Hildegarde, why did we ever meet! Hildegarde, Hildegarde, I love you, and I would die for you!"

Poor Dick indeed!

(To be continued.)

LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

—30—

CHAPTER X.—(continued.)

"I HOPE you are going to get rid of that black cob," he said, after a second's hesitation. "He is not fit for any lady to drive—a hard-mouthed, vicious, dangerous animal."

"Yes, I remember you saying you wondered my husband allowed me to drive such a brute!" she said, with a peculiar smile.

"Yes, and I put my foot in it. I mean, I said the wrong thing, as I always do," he replied, in a lower voice. "As I—I understand that you are a widow, and I beg your pardon for my stupid blunder most sincerely."

"You did not think I looked like a widow, I suppose," she observed, with her eyes bent upon her work, but her heart beating so fast that it seemed almost to choke her.

"No, since you ask me; I did not then, and I do not now."

"Appearances are deceitful sometimes," she said, raising her eyes, and looking into his face with a strange expression of mingled resentment and amazement.

Widow, indeed! What would he say if some wicked fairy were to whisper in his ear that the supposed widow was his own wife?

"And is it long since—since you have lost your husband?" he asked, with an air of well feigned sympathy.

"About three years!" she returned, her eyes again glued to her work.

What pretty little dainty hands she had, thought the young man beside her—so thin, and small, and taper!

But why were they shaking so strangely!—trembling so much that the needle seemed hardly under the command of those fairy fingers!

Perhaps the late Mr. Hill was really a sore subject. His suspicion was realised by a low voice suddenly saying,—

"Lord Ravenhill, please never speak to me of my husband again! It is, as you can imagine, a very painful subject."

"Oh! of course, certainly," he stammered. "In fact, I'm afraid, that for a stranger you will think I have been uncommonly free and easy, and inquisitive and rude!"

"Free and easy, and inquisitive and rude! How many more names are you going to call yourself?" she asked, with a smile.

"They seemed to be getting on very well," said Mary to herself, as she glanced stealthily at this most extraordinary pair.

And what a handsome couple they were! What marvellous self-command Nellie had brought to her aid!

She was working away and laughing, and chatting, and smiling as if her neighbour was the most ordinary, everyday acquaintance.

Ah! Mary—you don't know as much as you think! Appearances are deceitful.

Soon a large flock of visitors were ushered in, and scattered about the apartments, drinking tea and eating cake, and retailing the local gossip to Captain, Mrs. and Miss Fortescue.

The couple at the other side of the table remained undisturbed, and continued their conversation with uninterrupted zest.

"So!" said a discontented dandy to himself, as he glanced irritably at the pair in question, then at his own reflection in the glass, then at them again. "So the pretty widow has come off her high horse at last, and is letting that dark fellow that owns the big steam-yacht make himself very agreeable to her!"

He was talking very earnestly—very eagerly—about something or other, and she was listening quite complacently. Perhaps she would do the usual thing, and give him one of her awful snubs soon; and send him away like many others—a sadder, if not a wiser man!

He was an uncommonly good-looking man, too. May be that was the reason she was giving him such a long tether!

"There! He has got it at last!" he said to himself, with great glee, as he saw the yachting man push back his chair with a gesture of impatience, put down his tea-cup, and move over to where his friend, Captain Fortescue, was exercising all his attractions on two young ladies. What had Nellie said to drive him from her side. You shall hear.

After talking very pleasantly for some time, about ordinary every-day topics, Lord Ravenhill had suddenly harked back again to the subject of the black cob.

"I beg you will get rid of him, Mrs. Hill; he is not safe, I assure you he is not! He might do for a Polo pony, but he is certainly not cut out for harness. Send him up to Tattersall's, and oblige me."

"Oblige you? Why should I oblige you, Lord Ravenhill?" she asked, with a faint smile, and raised eyebrows.

"Well, oblige your friends, among whom I hope you will permit me to enrol myself!"

To that request there was no answer for some seconds.

"May I? May I consider myself your friend?" he urged.

"No!" she burst out suddenly. "No! I don't want your friendship."

Her companion gazed at her for a moment in stupefied astonishment. This was plain English with a vengeance!

"All right, Mrs. Hill," he answered, at last, reddening even under his sunburnt skin. "I'm not a fellow to intrude myself where I am not wanted, nor to offer my friendship twice!"

So saying he got up and left her, as we have already seen.

Nellie glanced after him as he walked across the room. It was wise—far wisest—to put a barrier between them at the very outset, she said to herself valiantly.

Friendship might lead to something else, to some ridiculous complications.

Best remain strangers.

She was a widow he had met accidentally at the seaside; and he was a friend of Teddy Fortescue's, and there the matter must end—would end—should end!

He was not a man to offer his friendship twice as he had said. But what possessed him to offer it at all!

She stole a good look at him, as she stood talking to Mary Fortescue—a leisurely, critical stare.

She could not help remarking that he was one of the handsomest men she had ever seen—tall, slight, and well-bred looking, with a rather grave, dark face.

"My husband!" she said to herself, inaudibly of course, and the blood mounted to her temples as she uttered the three syllables. How odd it seemed!

At any rate, he was a man of whom she could justly be proud, and she there and then felt a secret, strange little thrill of satisfaction, as she took in every inch of his well-cut features, the slightly haughty carriage of his head, and his graceful, well-knit figure.

"He is furious with me," she said to herself, "and it is just as well. I daresay if he had the most distant idea of who I was, he would be somewhat astounded; he would not think so much of me then—his toy, as I was to have been."

Nevertheless, when the little tea party broke up and Lord Ravenhill took his leave, she could not refrain from giving him her hand in answer to a very distant bow—and out of pure contrariness—a most charming, bewitching smile, the memory of which he carried away with him, and treasured most foolishly for three whole days.

CHAPTER XI.

"I WONDER at you, Nellie! I really am not easily astonished, but you astonished me this afternoon!" said her friend, coming into her room as she was dressing for dinner. "Such cool self-possession I never saw! How you could keep your countenance and chatter away in that charming, everyday manner to your own husband—speaking to him in that character for the first time—is quite beyond my comprehension! Were you not nervous! Were you not nearly bursting out laughing, or crying, or something?"

"I was nervous enough," said her friend, twisting her long hair into a neat coil, and inserting various hair pins with much judgment and deliberation; "and I was nearly hysterical too, when he asked me point-blank if I was a widow! It seemed such an outrageous question—coming—coming from my husband himself!"

"You appeared to be getting on swimmingly at first!" said Mary, seating herself beside the dressing-table, and staring at her friend with a long, exhaustive stare. "And did you say you were a widow?" raising her eyebrows.

"I said that I had lost my husband three years ago, which I fancy he imagines to mean you!"

"And after?" said Mary, briefly.

"Well, then he was inclined to be very sympathetic, but I soon put an end to all that by telling him that I would take it as a personal favour if he never alluded to my husband in any way whatever!"

"Well, I must say you have plenty of nerve," gasped Mary.

"Have I not?" triumphantly; "and then he asked if he might be enrolled as a friend. What do you think of that?" waving a lilywhite hand towards her companion, with a gesture of imperious interrogation.

"And you said—"

"And I said certainly not. Fancy such a suggestion the third time of meeting, and fancy him trying to strike up a friendship with a pretty widow like me!"—laughing—"when all the time he has a wife in the background!—my precious self. Again, imagine me in two characters—wife and widow! Imagine me trying to destroy my own domestic peace as the gay Mrs. Hill, and then coming down—rigid virtue and outraged feelings—the cast-off wife in the shape of Lady Ravenhill herself! Wouldn't he open his eyes?"

"I should rather imagine he would," assented her companion, quietly. "And when is this little comedy or tragedy coming off? When are you going to declare yourself?"

"Never," returned Nellie, shutting her dressing-case with a loud bang. "Never, my dear. He will go away and forget Mrs. Hill, who nearly snapped his nose off, and never guess how near he was to Eleanor Lady Ravenhill!"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" said her friend, jumping up impatiently. "Of course he will find out who you are yet; and indeed, I think I'll give him a hint—"

"If you ever do, Mary," interrupted her companion hastily, "I'll never speak to you again. Let well alone. We are very well as we are. Please, please don't meddle."

"I know it is fatal to mix oneself up with married people; but Nellie, dear, it seems flying in the face of Providence. You have your eyesight restored to you—you are twenty, pretty, and everything you ought to be!"

"Extremely obliged," making a deep curtsy.

"And it is as plain as can be that he likes you very much."

"But he has no business to like me, you bad girl, when he thinks I am Mrs. Hill and he has a wife already; it is most improper and abominable."

"Perhaps he knows who you are," suggested Mary, serenely.

"The fates forbid!" turning pale at the thought. "No! no, there is no fear of that. Next time we meet I shall certainly ask him about his wife!"

"You won't!" incredulously.

"Won't it and you shall hear where she is as far as he knows, and all about her," nodding her head encouragingly.

"Then you are really not going to declare yourself!"

"Certainly not; why should I! It is not in the bond. I like my liberty and he likes his, you may be sure!"

"Don't you think him awfully nice and good-looking?"

"Eem! middling." (Oh! Nellie, what a story.)

"I think he is one of the handsomest men I ever saw," said Mary, emphatically.

"Oh! fie, Mary, not nearly as handsome as Charley," mischievously.

"Charley is a dear fellow, but not a bit good-looking you know very well; in fact, to every one but me he is plain."

"Plain, is he! Well, never mind, handsome is that handsome does, and, by-the-way, I hope, talking of handsome people, that my dress will be down from Madame Elise no later than to-morrow night, for the 'Dragoons' ball on Thursday!"

"Do you think he will be there?" inquired Mary, eagerly.

"Who, Charley?"

"What nonsense! Your husband of course."

"Hush! the walls have ears. I dare say he will, as he says he likes dancing, and if he is I should not be surprised if for once I was to indulge in a mild flirtation. Fancy flirting with one's husband of three years' standing and more," making a grimace at herself in the glass. "Won't it be funny!"

"If you don't take care you will burn your fingers, ma'am, and be caught in your own trap," said Mary, impressively.

"And what is what you so pleasantly call 'my own trap,' if I may ask?" she said, airily.

"I think you are going to make your husband fool enough to fall desperately in love with his own wife, and then throw him over at the eleventh hour, in order to avenge yourself on him for some imagined wrongs."

"Imagined wrongs!" she echoed. "Much you know about it, my dear girl. Come along," taking her arm and sweeping out of the apartment. "There's the dinner bell, and as I had no tea I am quite ready for my evening meal."

"Horrid, prosaic little wretch," said Mary, pinching her ear. "No more heart, and no more sentiment in your body than that door."

"Oh! not so hard as all that. I could not hold my cup and saucer this afternoon, my hand shook so. So you see there is hope for her yet. I am pretty bad when I have to forego what I like almost better than dinner and breakfast put together—my cup of afternoon tea."

And then she broke into song,—

"Give, oh! give to me
A sweet and fragrant cup of tea."

The next day the waiters on the Parade had something new to stare at. The Marquis of Westbury had come round with his yacht, and disembarked several very smart-looking people, who were up at the "Granville Arms" for a few days, while the yacht underwent some slight repairs.

There were Lord and Lady Westbury, Mrs. Burton Montagu, Mrs. Derwent, Mr. Corballis, and Sir Otto Browne.

Their costumes made many people stare and turn their heads, as they walked down the Parade, and criticised the appearance of everyone in rather loud tones.

Mrs. Burton Montagu was attired in a bright red cloth tailor-made suit, which had a most startling effect; a wide-brimmed sailor hat, with a red ribbon and a red parasol, completed her "get up."

Lady Westbury was dressed in a bright blue serge, braided with gold; and Mrs. Derwent was comparatively quiet in a well-fitting dark blue costume, with a white waistcoat.

As they talked, and laughed, and lounged along, they hailed with delight the approach of a friend,

and "spoke him," or hailed him, as they would have said, a long way off.

"Why Ravenhill! Why, old bird! What wind has blown you to these parts?" demanded Lord Westbury of his brother peer, with a loud resounding slap on the back.

He was accosted with equal effusion by the three ladies, especially, needless to say, by Amy, who looked up into his face with her most confidential smile, and murmured,—

"Dear Hugh, who would have expected to meet you here?"

"We are so glad to see you! It's a perfect godsend to meet a 'familiar' in this very slow-looking place! Come along," said Lady Westbury, "come and walk between Amy and me, and tell all about yourself. We thought you had gone to Norway weeks ago."

"No, I'm not going this season, I believe."

"You believe!" mimicking his accent. "And what is the attraction here? Come now, 'confession is good for the soul.'"

At this instant they met and passed Mrs. Hill and Mary, who were suddenly confronted by these brilliant strangers, and who passed Lord Ravenhill with a smile and a bow.

"Hullo!" said Sir Otto, now speaking for the first time at the full pitch of a naturally robust organ. "What a stunning pretty girl, the one in white! So that's the attraction, is it, eh! old fellow? You need not blush. I admire your taste. Any more of the same pattern in these parts?" facetiously.

Lord Ravenhill, needless to state, did not relish this graceful bit of badinage at all, neither did Mrs. Derwent, who glanced back, in defiance of all polite customs, after the two girls who were going up the Parade—tall, slight, and well-dressed; thorough ladies every inch to judge from their walk and appearance.

"Which of them is it, Hugh?" she inquired, with a spiteful little smile.

"The one in white, of course," put in Sir Otto with a laugh; "she was by long chalk the best looking."

"Ah! we must find out who she is, and all about her," said Constance, sweetly. "You will have to bring them to call on us at the Granville, Hugh, if they are friends of yours! Bring them to see us, do!"

"Hardly worth their while when you are only here for a few days," he returned, somewhat ungraciously.

"Oh, I say! Now don't be childish," said Lady Westbury, frankly; "share your good things with us, and don't be greedy. I should like to see more of that girl with the pretty gray eyes. So as you know I am not a person to be denied, you will have to get her to come round and call at the Granville this very afternoon—the sooner we all know each other the better. You all agree with me," looking smilingly round the circle, who were now standing in a group, and taking up the best part of the middle of the Parade, as if it was their exclusive private property.

The idea was carried with acclamation, but Lord Ravenhill would not commit himself further than by saying he would "see about it" next day.

Lady Westbury, backed up by Mrs. Derwent, was so very insistent, that at last Lord Ravenhill had to hint to Mrs. Fortescue that some friends of his were staying at the Granville, and he would be very glad if she would call on them, which she did, accompanied by Mary—Mary only—for Nellie had declared once for all that she would not go and "wait upon them," as she called it.

She did not like the look of them; they seemed bored and fast, and did not appeal to her in any way.

She and Mary had not failed to remark them that morning on the Parade, and made a mental note that "they did not think much of Lord Ravenhill's friends!"

The bold, black-eyed woman looked the worst, they agreed—her face was so white, her eyes so sunken.

She looked like a tragedy queen, with the manners of a barmaid.

Nellie's absence was a great disappointment to

the party in general, and a great relief to Lord Ravenhill in particular.

Somehow, although she snubbed him so, he did not want pretty, girlish-looking, unsophisticated Mrs. Hill to be intimate with "these people," as he called them to himself.

What was it about her that was so taking? Everything he told himself, frankly—her face, her smile, her eyes, her pretty figure, and her merry laugh.

How could she laugh and look so happy and careless if she had gone through a sea of trouble, as hinted by Captain Fortescue?

Some people were of an elastic nature, and cast all their cares behind them—and perhaps she was one of them.

When he had left Mrs. Fortescue at her own door, he went out for what he called "a lively breather" on the downs; hired a nag from a livery stable, and started for a solitary gallop, partly to get away from this incubus at the Granville, if not altogether.

"There is nothing like a good rousing gallop for cleansing away the cobwebs," he said to himself, as he brought his panting borrowed steed to a walk at the bottom of a long slope.

Just disappearing over the crest of it he saw a lady, followed by a groom.

"Could it be Mrs. Hill? Mrs. Hill!" he said to himself, impatiently. "I seem to have her on the brain; every fair-haired girl I take to be Mrs. Hill. I don't even know if she rides. However, we shall soon see," and coming up at a smart canter, he did see, and it was Mrs. Hill, riding a very handsome black hunter, and looking charming in a neat brown riding habit.

"This is a stroke of good luck, Mrs. Hill," he said, joining her, and taking off his hat. "May I be your escort, for want of a better!"

"Oh, certainly," she answered, with a pretty little nod. "It is rather dull work always riding by oneself."

"Does Miss Fortescue not ride then?" riding up confidentially close.

"No, she is afraid, and hates it, for one thing, and has not got a horse for another."

"This, I suppose, is your own animal," pointing at her handsome, well-bred mount—"not hired?"

"Yes; Blackbird is my own," patting his back—"and so is Butterfly, the one the groom is on. I keep them at livery stables not far from Marine Parade."

Lord Ravenhill glanced at Butterfly, another fine horse, who must have cost three figures at the least, and remembered that Mrs. Hill was a richly-jointed widow, and held his tongue.

She looked to her greatest advantage in the saddle, and rode well, and seemed perfectly at her ease as Blackbird capered and shied and jumped in pure exuberance of youth and spirit.

"He has not been out for ages!" she said, apologetically, as he shied at a sheep right across the other horse. "If you don't mind we will have a gallop, and I'll take it out of him," and in another moment away they went at the top of their speed, with the wind whistling past their riders' ears, and the springing, green turf under their feet.

Mrs. Hill was no mere Rotten-row rider. She put Blackbird over several sheep hurdles in a very workmanlike manner, and elicited a further amount of admiration and respect from her astonished cavalier, who half an hour ago was not aware that riding was among her accomplishments.

Riding was, of all others, the accomplishment in a woman that took him by storm, being a very keen first flight man himself, and spending from November till April in eager and daily pursuit, Sundays excepted of the sport of kings!

"I had no idea you were such a first-rate horsewoman, Mrs. Hill!" he said, as, slightly out of breath, and flushed with their late gallop, she brought her Blackbird once more to a walk.

"Oh, I'm not much yet," she answered in a disparaging tone. "I never was on anything but a pony till about two years ago."

"Then you never rode until after your husband?"

"Hush! I told you never to mention him!"

she said impatiently. "Next time you forget we shall be cuts—" nodding her head impressively.

"All right," he said, laughing, "I'll remember. And you never rode anything but a pony before!"

"Yes, when I was a child; but I used to stick on very well; and a pony is twice as hard to ride as a horse—it twists and turns round so sharply under you, and they mostly have such awful mouths!"

"Yes, quite true. You would not ride so well now if you had not served a good apprenticeship to the pony, and—where did you say?"

"I did not say anywhere," she answered, with a laugh; "and I do not see why you are to have all the questions to yourself. I am going to take a leaf out of your book," she continued, looking at him under her long eyelashes. "Is it true, Lord Ravenhill that you are a married man?"

If a shell had exploded on the grass beneath him he could not have been more taken aback than he was by this simple question. However, after a second's hesitation, he found his voice, and said very quietly,—

"Quite true, I am a Benedict, but how did you know?"

"How! how!" he asked himself anxiously. Not that he had any real desire to conceal the fact, but he had almost lost sight of it latterly himself.

"Oh, a little bird told me," she said, coolly settling her reins. "That is question number one. Now tell me—leaning towards him in a pretty, confidential attitude—"where is Lady Ravenhill?"

"I don't know," he answered, gloomily gnawing his moustache.

"Nor care!" she inquired, with a mischievous laugh.

"Well, since you will have it, nor care," he replied.

"What a model husband!" knocking a fluff off her horse's shoulder. "Now tell me something else. How does she put up with such treatment?"

"Come, now, Mrs. Hill, this is not fair," he said, in a tone of deep expostulation. "You won't let me speak of your husband—I mean—I'm sure I beg your pardon—past, and yet I'm to tell you all my domestic affairs. Now, I call that hard lines!"

"Not a bit of it," cheerfully. "However, I will only ask one more question, and that is, Does your wife approve of your making overtures of friendship to pretty girls—for I am only a girl—like me?"

"I'm sure I can't say, but I don't suppose she would care."

"I shouldn't like it if you were my husband,—you know," with a killing smile, and another look from underneath her eyelashes.

"What is the harm of friendship? It's not as if I was—was—was," stammering and getting rather red.

"Was what? Come!"

"Making love to you, since I may speak plainly!"

"No, of course not," scornfully; "but somehow friendship between a young married man—like you—I speak plainly too, you see, and boldly—for I'm twice as bold on horseback as anywhere else. Friendship between you and a young matron like me," smiling and blushing very much, "is not looked on with favour by the world at large—now is it?"

"The sort of friendship that I offer you would be," he answered, doggedly. "What I mean—I ask for nothing—only if ever you were in trouble or danger of any kind to come and help you. I ask you to feel—since you told me the other day you were alone in the world—that, in any crisis, you may know that you can always fall back upon me. There is no harm in that. I ask for no return."

"But why should you make such a strange offer to an almost total stranger?" knocking off another fly; "or is it a little way you have?" smiling.

"You are no stranger to me now. I cannot

explain it. I feel as if I had known you for years."

Certainly Hugh was getting hot and Nellie grew strangely red.

"I cannot tell what it is that makes me like you, for as a rule I hate women like poison."

"Thank you!" nodding her acknowledgment with a smile.

"I suppose there is some odd sort of affinity between us?"

"Us!" she cried, heartily. "Please speak for yourself."

"Well, I will! I cannot tell how it is; but"—taking his courage in both hands—"I like you better than any girl I ever saw. That day on the beach I felt it the instant I spoke to you. We cannot help ourselves! he concluded, lamely, but in a tone of deep conviction.

"Can we not? I wonder what your wife would say, if she could hear you?"

"I don't care if she did," recklessly; "I would repeat every word I have said to you this afternoon to her, and not feel the least afraid. In fact, I don't care if the whole town of Seabeach heard me"—defiantly.

"But I should care very much indeed! Fancy what they would say of me, if they heard a married man telling me he liked me better than any girl he ever met in his life, and that he did not care if his wife heard him? By-the-by, what is she like?" looking at him curiously.

"She—she—I don't know; in short, as you are so inquisitive, I may as well tell you that I have never seen her."

"Never seen her!" she echoed, turning her lovely face full on him. "What are you saying? Just think."

"I married my cousin, and succeeded to my uncle's fortune as an inducement. She is blind, and wore a veil. I never saw her face. We parted by her wish at the church door for ever, she said, never to meet again."

"And you have never met since?"

"Never."

"Have you no idea where she is?"

"No. I often tried to discover, through our man of business, but in vain. She is abroad, I fancy. I heard she was at Aix-les-Bains three years ago, and was likely to remain on the continent. Really a miserable state of affairs, is it not?" he asked, gravely.

"Would you not like to see her?" she asked, without making any direct reply to his question.

"Yes, I should. I've often asked myself if I was not a mercenary wretch to make such a marriage?"

"And you were!" put in Mrs. Hill, candidly.

"I was in debt—that was it. Awfully hard up—and there was no other way—not one."

"No other way than this blind woman's fortune—eh?"

"Yes," he assented. "I feel degraded when I think of it. I have often wondered if something could not be done to her eyes—if she might not regain her sight. It would be terrible to sit night and day in outer darkness."

"Terrible indeed!" assented Nellie, so forcibly that he gazed at her in astonishment.

"You speak as if you knew all about it," he said.

"I do," she returned, "and no one pities the blind so much, or feels as keenly for them as I do."

"Well now, you know all about her," he said, as they came in sight of the town. "And no doubt you despise me as a heartless, mercenary wretch. But I am more to be pitied than you imagine. I have no sisters, no cousins, and, so to speak, no wife. I am, and ever have been, faithful to her in word and deed. I am for ever cut off from love and home—a real home—like other men. I seem to be drifting aimlessly about the world—dead. But I'm boring you, I know, talking so much about myself."

"Not at all," she said, eagerly. "I like it. And you have no womankind at all!"

"No, not one, and there is not a woman in the world—except, perhaps, one—who would care a brass button if I was dead to-morrow!"

"Who is that one?" she asked, quickly, "your wife?"

"My wife!" with a short laugh. "No."

"Then who?" pertinaciously. "Since you have told me so much, tell me all," coaxingly.

"Since I have told you so much I will tell you no more. You would be too wise; you would," smiling, "be dangerous!"

"Well, listen to me, Lord Ravenhill," she said, after a silence, suddenly reining up her horse at the end of a lane just before they came into the town; "you offered me your friendship the other day; and," putting out her pretty little gloved hand, "on second thoughts, I accept it, and here is my hand on the bargain."

Twenty minutes later she threw open the door of hers and Mary's joint bedroom, exclaiming, "Guess whom I've been riding with all the afternoon?" tossing her hat and whip on her bed; "I give you six guesses, my dear."

"Your husband, of course!" promptly.

"Clever girl! but you must not call him that on any account."

"And had you a pleasant ride? But I need not ask."

"Yes, quite charming. He is a first-rate horseman, and I've come to the conclusion that—that I like him very much indeed—as a friend."

CHAPTER XII.

It was the night of the Dragons' Ball, and Mrs. Fortescue and son and daughter were patiently waiting in the hall for Nellie. Presently she came tripping down the wide staircase in Madame Elise's ball-dress, carrying an enormous white bouquet in her hand, and looking everything that her best friends could wish.

Her gown was white silk and tulle and silver; in her hair were three superb diamond stars, and round her throat a riviere of the same bright stones—family jewels, never worn before.

"How do I look?" she asked, running down the last few steps, and making a deep courtesy to Mrs. Fortescue, who sat on a hall chair in regal splendour.

"You look charming, my dear! Your dress is perfect, and your diamonds magnificent!" said Mrs. Fortescue, affectionately.

"He won't recognise them, I suppose!" said Mary, in a lower tone, as she helped her friend into a long, white satin cloak, lined with soft white fur.

"No, no! my dear! He never saw them; they belonged to the other side of the house! You need not be alarmed."

"You will take the shine out of everybody to-night," said Teddy, staring hard at her stars, as he helped her into the brougham. "How they flash and shine. I've never seen them before! Been in pawn?" facetiously.

"No!" returned Nellie, laughing; "this is their first appearance for years!"

"I'm sure the Dragons ought to feel highly honoured," he said, mockingly.

"Of course they will be! Mind you tell them!" impressively.

"By the way, I suppose those queer friends of Ravenhill's will be here to-night? I shall go in for Mrs. Burton Montagu. I'm sure she's good fun!" said Captain Fortescue.

"Why not the black-eyed beauty?" suggested his sister, with a laugh.

"Oh! It strikes me that she has other fish to fry—and any way, I don't admire her. She looks a dangerous volcanic sort of individual. I'll leave her to Ravenhill. Here we are. By George! what a crowd! The whole street is blocked. There are some people getting out and walking. What a hurry they are in! The Westbury lot, of course!"

Ten minutes later, when they made their way under the porch, and up the red-carpeted steps, and into the ladies' dressing room, they found Lady Westbury and her two friends still in possession of the cheval glass, arranging their dresses, their hair, and their complexions. Mrs. Burton, in deep red again, Lady Westbury in

black, Mrs. Derwent in old gold satin and tulle, very low in the neck, and with two straps for sleeves across her round, white shoulders; in her hair three bands of gold, and in her hand a scarlet bouquet. She looked like Cleopatra, only wanting the asp; but that she carried, had people but known, under her tongue—behind her large, square white teeth.

The party exchanged a few words with Mrs. Fortescue, stared broadly and exhaustively at the pretty slight girl in the white cloak; and were presented to Mrs. Hill. When Mrs. Hill removed her veil they stared still harder. What diamonds! What a dress! It filled them with rage and envy, as their six eyes took in every item of the pretty figure before them. This Mrs. Hill looked quite a girl—was not a bit made up! No, and evidently had heaps of money!

"Your married daughter, Mrs. Fortescue, I presume!" said Mrs. Derwent, sweetly.

"Oh, no! But my adopted daughter!" returned Mrs. Fortescue, hastily, moving away so as to make room for the crowds of shawled and cloaked ladies, old and young, who had come crumpling in as the music had struck up, and the ball had commenced. Mrs. Fortescue and her two young ladies passed out after Lady Westbury and her party, and found Lord Ravenhill on the landing, evidently waiting for someone. How well he looked in evening dress, with a white flower in his button-hole!

Before he had time to address anyone, Mrs. Derwent accosted him eagerly, saying, as she seized him,—

"Oh, Hugh! How nice of you to be here to meet us; we hardly know anyone. Come along"—taking his arm confidentially—"I am going to give you the first Lancers and half-a-dozen waltzes."

Nellie, who was standing behind them, heard this generous offer with her own astonished ears.

"Hugh," too! Could this Mrs. Derwent, this bold-looking woman with the bare shoulders, be the one woman he had so mysteriously alluded to! What an odious, forward, hateful creature!

The crowd was such that Lord Ravenhill and his partner were carried away by it, and Nellie fell back on Teddy, who escorted her to where the hosts received their guests.

At the entrance to the fine old oak-lined Town-hall, which was lit up by a profusion of wax candles, and decorated with banners, and flags, and flowers, and already filled with a very gay and brilliant company, Nellie was speedily surrounded by partners; her card was full when the first Lancers was over, and Lord Ravenhill, with Mrs. Derwent still clinging to his arm, came up and begged for the honour of a dance.

"I am very sorry," she replied, holding up her programme, "but I have not one to give you. You can see yourself."

"Oh, nonsense!" he exclaimed, impatiently; "I must and will have a dance! You must throw over somebody, if the worst comes to the worst!"

"No, no!" she returned with a shake of her head. "I am not so shabby, nor so faithless!"

"Oh, but—" he was beginning to expostulate, when Mrs. Derwent interrupted him petulantly,—

"My dear Hugh! How can you be so foolish and so conceited as to expect Mrs. Hill to throw over her partners—probably her most particular friends—for a stranger like you, and I am not going to lose any more of this delicious waltz, so come along!" and Mrs. Hill's partner, who had been boiling over with impatience, was evidently of the same opinion, for in another second she found herself floating round the room.

After two turns round that large apartment she paused to take breath and look on.

There was Teddy and one of the Seabeach belles, Mary and Charlie, and coming round this way, her husband and Mrs. Derwent.

How well they both danced—so easily and quietly—but what an odious way the woman held herself! With her head almost resting on his shoulders—almost, as it were, reclining in his arms.

She smiled a slow smile of soft contented triumph into Nellie's disapproving face as she floated gracefully by.

She had taken possession of Hugh for the evening—he knew it well! She was like an octopus—there was no shaking her off.

Once upon a time he hugged these chains, and was supremely happy in her society. Now the yoke was galling to the last degree, and he hated Mrs. Derwent secretly in his heart—shrank from her—avoided her on every possible occasion; but the more he did so the more eagerly and persistently she pursued him. Would she ever learn that the old, old story was over and done with years ago and the book closed—never to be opened again?

No! She would not. She closed her eyes to the fact, shut her ears to everything that might awaken her common sense, and tried to believe in her heart that he was as much her slave as ever.

Of course, now he was a married man, he had become less outspoken, more prudent, and, comparatively speaking, cool; but that her vanity told her was merely a cloak to disguise his real feelings, which were as warm as ever. Lady Ravenhill was, she believed, an idiot, and an invalid, who could not live for ever. Hugh was now wealthy, and in every way a desirable match, and how she hoped that his wife would die soon! Meanwhile he must not be taking up any foolish passing fancies for pretty little widows like Mrs. Hill. No, no! It would be her care to guard against all that kind of thing, and keep him out of scrapes!

Hugh himself was spending a most unsatisfactory, miserable evening. How was he to shake off Conny? She had no friends to whom he could pass her on! She was a stranger in the room, and seemed to have no wish to extend her acquaintance, and to be perfectly content with him as her partner for the evening. He watched with angry, envious eyes, pretty Mrs. Hill dancing dance after dance with dragon after dragon—or the centre of an admiring little circle—evidently enjoying herself immensely. At last he gave up dancing, and declared somewhat abruptly that he would sit it out—sitting out suited Conny perfectly well—and she led him to a large balcony, covered in with an awning, and full of cosy deep chairs, and stands of flowering shrubs. Here he threw himself into the nearest seat, resigned to fate, and resigned to Conny's long outpourings of her feelings—her solitude, her craving for companionship, her affection for old friends, her memories of the days that were no more; whilst he contented himself with dropping an occasional Yes and No, which was all that her conversation required to keep it in full tide.

Once or twice he politely strangled a yawn behind his white-gloved hand, and more than once he devoutly wished that Conny would not sit so very close to him. There was room on the sofa for half-a-dozen, he told himself irritably, and why did she hold her fan up before both their faces so mysteriously? "Why!" In fact, if this kind of thing was to go on all night he could not stand it. He would plead sudden illness, fever and ague, bleeding at the nose, anything to shake off this woman of the sea, and go home to the yacht and go to bed. So much for the evening he had been looking forward to with such pleasure—dancing and talking to and sitting out with his little friend Mrs. Hill. As he was thinking all these things, that young lady herself and one of her hosts came into the verandah, breathless after a long waltz, and seated themselves in two low wicker chairs just opposite, laughing and chattering gay nonsense. At first Nellie did not recognise the couple opposite, but the yellow dress and red bouquet soon struck her. And then who was the man! who was perched behind the huge black fan, and who was sitting so affectionately close to Mrs. Derwent, whilst she whispered into his sympathetic ear? Who but Lord Ravenhill!

"Rather a case that, eh?" said her warrior friend, following her eyes. "We are almost *de trop* here," laughing; "but I don't see why they should have such a jolly place all to themselves, do you, eh?"

Mrs. Hill made some kind of mechanical comment; the picture opposite had an odious—a horrible fascination for her. She coloured with

indignation and surprise, as she kept her eyes fixed on that big fan. She was not jealous, she told herself eagerly. Oh, dear no! It was nothing to her, of course, but she certainly did not like to see her husband making a fool of himself with that horrid, bold, fast woman.

Suddenly Hugh happened to raise his head from a critical study of the carpet, and drew himself back from the protecting fan.

He fairly started as he was confronted by that pretty little fair contemptuous face opposite, and coloured like a schoolboy in his turn with shame and annoyance.

"Look here, Conny!" he said, abruptly. "Have we not been here about long enough, don't you think, eh? Come along down and I'll get you some supper;" and jumping up, and offering his arm with great alacrity, he led her from the balcony down below to the supper-room.

As he was busily supplying her very large appetite he encountered Teddy, who had eaten and was filled, and looked a happy, contented gentleman at large.

"For mercy sake, Teddy," he implored, as he carved a *pate* for his partner. "Take Mrs. Derwent off my hands for a while; she has stuck to me like a burr the whole evening, and I've had more than my share."

"I thought you liked it, so I did not interfere," said his friend, with a lazy laugh.

"Liked it, I'm nearly crazy with the sound of her tongue, and if you don't rescue me like a good man and true, I'll leave this scene of revelry, for I can't stand it any longer. I've offered to introduce her to fellows, but she would not hear of it—no such luck."

"Saw through your little game I suppose, eh?"

"Rather, I imagine; and now look here, Teddy! You come up and ask her to dance, and mind you take no refusal. She dances Al, too," encouragingly.

"But, my dear sir—"

"Never mind dear sirring me, you must do it. You've had your fun this evening, and it's hard lines if I am not to have any."

"By fun I suppose you mean dancing with Mrs. Hill, but it will be no go. Her card is full hours ago."

"Are you down among the lucky ones?"

"I am, of course!" emphatically.

"Well, then, you'll just give me your dance. I'll do as much for you another time, old fellow."

"Upon my word I like your cheek. I'm to take over your partner and you mine! You are a cool chap, and no mistake."

"Here!" interrupted the other, hastily; "I've no time to stop and argue. Come away after me and be introduced," stalking away towards Mrs. Derwent with a well-filled plate in his hand.

In the meanwhile Nellie and her partner were sitting in the balcony discussing that late *vis-à-vis*.

"That's a good-looking fellow, Ravenhill, is he not," said Nellie's partner, Captain Bohun. "I remember him when he was in the First Life. He went the pace then, and no mistake; and only his old uncle died in the very nick of time, and left him a pot of money, he would have been up no end of a tree."

"Really!" indifferently.

"Yes, he is an awfully good fellow—very popular with fellows. I thought that old business with Mrs. D. was all over ages ago," he added, reflectively.

"What old business?" demanded Nellie, with rising colour.

"Oh, four or five years ago he was deadly spoony on her, and then he cooled off; in fact, it was rumoured that he was married. Maybe you have heard the story?" crossing his legs comfortably.

"Married! Really!" said Nellie, assuming an air of intense astonishment.

"Yes, to some cousin or other; but as she has never been seen I'm inclined not to believe it myself. Someone would have seen his wife in the course of three or four years, but I've never met a soul who had either heard

of her or laid eyes on her. Looks rather fishy!"

"It certainly looks odd!" assented Lady Ravenhill, coolly.

"Yes, the only thing is, he never has shown any desire to marry anyone else, nor paid anyone any attention all this time, and he is now rather a parti, and ought to marry on account of the title and estate, you know; but as he never goes in for ladies much now it makes me sometimes fancy there is a wife—not presentable, of course—in the background."

"Then you say he was very much in love with Mrs. Derwent, once upon a time?"

"Awfully! but that was when he had not a shilling, and now he has thousands. He does not seem to fancy her so much—the way of the world, eh?"

"But they say one always returns to one's first love," said Nellie, carelessly.

"Don't believe a word of it—any way he won't seem shockingly bored just now; and once a woman begins to bore a man it's all up."

"I did not think he looked bored," replied Nellie, decidedly.

"Ah, but he was. You may not know the play of his features as I do—in fact of course you don't—as I suppose you never saw him before; and, talk of the deuce, here he is, Ravenhill, we've been just discussing you."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," bowing. "I hope you let me off cheap."

"Oh, so so—better than you deserved. We were saying how immensely you appeared to be enjoying yourself just now—improving the shining hour to any extent," said Captain Bohun, jocosely.

"Enjoying myself immensely, as you say," he responded somewhat stiffly. "Mrs. Hill, I have come to beg for one dance," he added, turning to his wife; "only one—I was behind-hand in getting my name put down when we first came in. I missed you on the stairs."

"But I assure you that my card is full," said Nellie, sweetly.

"Fortescue says I may have his—this next waltz—as a great favour—if you have no objection," he persisted, and he spoke so resolutely and looked so determined that it was easy to see he was not a man to be denied.

"Oh! if Captain Fortescue chooses to pass me on like this"—rising—"of course there is no more to be said," with a little aggrieved laugh.

"Then I shall say *au revoir*," turning to Captain Bohun, with a smile; and, taking her husband's arm, she descended to the ball-room, and in two minutes more they had plunged into the thickest of the fray—his arm round her waist—her hand in his. Not so good—not so experienced a waltzer as Mrs. Derwent, Nellie still was light as a feather, had a natural taste for the amusement, and danced well; besides this, anyone would have danced well with Lord Ravenhill, a celebrated leader of cotillions, and one of the best partners in London. Firm, and steady, and cool, he knew when to go the pace, when to slacken, when to cut in between two blundering couples, and when to stop, and his step was perfection itself—so all the girls said when they compared notes over their hair-brushing operations that "they knew no one they liked as well for a partner as Hugh Ravenhill—he held you so nicely too, and nothing ever knocked him out of time or step." Round and round and round, they went easily and lightly to La Perouse waltz. At last it waltzed out its very last bars; and Nellie, panting slightly and flushed was led off to the supper-room by her partner, who selected a charming little table for two—made raids on the waiters, and having got the whereabouts of a charming little supper took his place as her *vis-à-vis*. Soup was despatched, lobster mayonnaise, and iced pudding. A good deal of desultory conversation was made between them.

"It would have been rather too much of a good thing if he had not had one dance. Would it not?" he asked, imperiously.

"Oh! I don't know," she replied, gaily. "Why not?"

"I had no idea your little ladyship was in

such demand, or I would not have been let in; but your card was crammed, and you were beset with a mob of fellows before you were five minutes in the room."

"And as for you, you were engaged on the landing," she said, with a knowing smile.

"Oh, you heard her!"—reluctantly. "Well, you know, she is an old friend," apologetically; "so it's rather different."

"Oh! pray"—spreading out her pretty little hands beseechingly—"don't make any excuses to me. But what would your wife say if she heard a lady engaging you for six waltzes in one breath?"

"I'm very sorry I ever told you anything about my wife," he said, impatiently. "I suppose now you will be always harking back to 'What would she say?'"

"I don't care about talking of her, if you don't," frankly; but breaking up bread-crumbs into quite a pile, she added, "Of course, Mrs. Derwent is the one woman you spoke of yesterday. Tell me something about her. She has the use of her eyes"—most emphatically—"and will be far more interesting than Lady Ravenhill. Have you known her long?"

"Here you go with your catechism again," smiling under his moustache. "About ten years."

"Ten years! Why, then, she must be quite old."

"Old in comparison to you; but still young enough."

"How old, then, do you think I am?" asked Nellie, playfully.

"About one or two-and-twenty," he replied looking at her reflectively.

"And how old are you?" she asked.

"Oh, quite elderly. I shall be thirty next March."

"And Mrs. Derwent was your first love," she said, in a quiet matter-of-fact voice, "so I have been told."

"People must always find something to say," he exclaimed, angrily. "First love is all humbug."

"Do you think so? I am sorry for that," with raised brows.

"Then may I ask what is your experience, Mrs. Hill?"

"I have none—absolutely none. Nay, you need not look as if you did not believe me; it is a fact. I've never been the smallest scrap in love, and know no more about it personally than this table."

"And yet you married," indignantly.

"And yet," pushing away her chair, "as you say I married, so for that matter did you."

(To be continued.)

TWO GIRLS.

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CHAPTER XVII.

GLADYS NAIRN walked quickly upstairs, the Professor followed more leisurely; he was an old man, and his pace was never very hurried, besides, the stairs at Tregarthan Mansions were steep—economy, rather than ease, having been studied in their architecture. The Professor had quite lost sight of his young friend, when suddenly he heard a piercing shriek, and rushed on forgetting his age and feebleness, feeling pretty sure something was the matter.

On the landing immediately below that occupied by his young friends, he passed a gentleman who was descending the stairs, a tall, fine-looking man, well-dressed and with an air of decided prosperity. It never came into the Professor's head to connect this stranger with the shriek he had heard, his idea was that some nervous fear had seized on Gladys at finding herself alone before the locked door of her little home. He hurried on to find his poor little assistant stretched senseless on the floor, the gas jet showing her white, still face, and the blood fast flowing from a wound in her side.

Never in his life had the old man felt more

bewildered. The door of the flat stood open, and a light within was plainly visible, yet certainly Gladys had had no time to put the key in the lock, far less to go inside and light a candle. At that moment two fellow tenants came up, a kindly well-to-do couple, who lived on the third floor, and knew the Nairns by sight. The piercing shriek had reached them and brought them up to see what was wrong.

"The gentleman said there had been an accident. What is it?" asked Mr. Barton.

"I can tell you nothing," replied the Professor. "She was a little in front, poor child. I suddenly heard a piercing shriek and rushed up to find her—thus."

Very gently Mr. Barton raised the slender form and carried it into the flat. He laid Gladys on her own little white bed, and then said, gravely,—

"She has been stabbed by a dagger. If you will stay with her, Margaret, I will go for a doctor."

Mrs. Barton's wits were very quick.

"Alfred, that man did it. That was why he tried to prevent us from coming here."

The Professor found his voice.

"Someone has broken in. See, the little girl was coming home with the key in her pocket, and we find the door open, and the lamp lighted."

Mrs. Barton peeped into the pretty sitting-room, everything was in disorder. A desk was open on the table and the floor strewn with its contents.

"You are right," she said gravely, to the Professor, "someone has been here, but I can't understand it. People who live in a fifth floor flat don't generally tempt burglars to molest them, and those two girls were so sweet and innocent I don't believe they could have had an enemy. Now, Mr. Chester, if you'll go and light the little stove in the kitchen I'll get her into bed. My husband will be back almost directly with the doctor, and then we ought to think about sending for the police."

Professor Chester obeyed the energetic lady. He was so dazed it was really a comfort to him to be told what to do. He lighted the stove and put the kettle on while Mrs. Barton got Gladys into bed, and discovered that the only wound was in the left side, some inches below the heart. The kind-hearted woman strove in vain to stop the bleeding. She longed for the doctor's coming, for she began to fear the dagger had touched some artery near the heart.

It seemed hours to the anxious watcher, but really it was only twenty minutes before Mr. Barton returned with Dr. Gill. The two were old acquaintances, and on the way the former had told the doctor all he knew of the mysterious occurrence.

Dr. Gill went straight into the bedroom. The Professor looked up anxiously at Mr. Barton.

"I shall never forgive myself if she dies. I ought to have kept her in sight."

"Nonsense," said the other kindly. "You couldn't possibly expect harm would come to her. We've picked up the dagger. It was lying on the stairs just below. I think there isn't a doubt the man who spoke to us is the assailant. Only I can't make out his object."

"She disturbed him, perhaps, in his wicked work."

Mr. Barton shook his head.

"He could have run off and eluded pursuit. He must have been a madman, or else have been a personal enemy of the Nairns, only, poor girl, they always seemed so bright and light-hearted, I should have said they had not an enemy in the world."

Dr. Gill joined them with a very grave face.

"It is worse than I expected," he said, sadly.

"I doubt if she will pull through it. She is fearfully delicate, and the shock to her system is terrible, without thinking of the wound; the bleeding is stopped, however, and if she can sleep she may do."

"Is she conscious?" asked the Professor.

"She was once, and asked if you were safe."

"Heaven bless her," murmured the old man.

"She is particularly anxious her sister should not be frightened," went on the doctor, "but

Miss Nairn must certainly be telegraphed to as soon as the offices open. Do you know her address, Professor?"

"Yes—she is coming home to-morrow or Friday, but it would be best to wire."

"I'll see to it if you'll give me the address," said Dr. Gill. "Mrs. Barton has promised to stay with the poor girl to-night, and I shall be round the first thing in the morning."

"I don't grudge Miss Nairn anything my wife can do for her," said Mr. Barton, gravely, "but after what has happened I can't leave Margaret here alone; if she stays I shall spend the night on this sofa. That man might come back to finish his evil work or—a hundred things."

"You are quite right," said Dr. Gill. "Professor, you saw the man in question, will you come with me and we will give information to the police on our way home."

"Is it necessary? Can't we wait till Gladys is well enough to tell us what she wishes?"

"My good sir, that day may never come. I have grave doubts of her recovery; we owe it to the poor girl and still more to her sister, to try and get the man identified and punished. Don't you see, these two girls are utterly defenceless; they live alone, they seem to have not a relative in the world to look after them."

"Yes. I suppose you are right," admitted the Professor. "Well, doctor, I could swear to that man anywhere; it was an uncommon face, and there was something evil about it."

By this time it was getting late, past eleven, but when the Professor and Doctor Gill turned into the police station, an inspector was ready to hear their story.

He listened with great attention, made the Professor describe the man he had met on the stairs twice and then said slowly,—

"That man is wanted for a robbery in Northshire; we only had his description this afternoon from the office there, and your account is correct in every particular except the dress—but he'd be able to change his clothes, and, indeed, buy a new rig out in a couple of hours."

"I shall be at the mansions early to-morrow," said the old Professor to Dr. Gill, "but I must go home now; my wife is not strong, and I fear she must be terrified already at my long absence."

The next day as soon as the telegraph office opened, Dr. Gill, who had already paid an early visit to Gladys, despatched the following message to May Nairn—

"Return at once; your sister is ill and needs you."

The telegram reached Chilton Hall as the family lingered over a late breakfast. Mrs. Anstruther watched her guest's face grow suddenly white, and asked anxiously—

"Have you bad news, dear?"

May put the message into her hand.

"A Dr. Gill sends it. I have heard of him; he attends some friends of ours. Gladys must be very ill for him to telegraph."

"You will catch the morning train if I help you pack," said Mrs. Anstruther kindly. "My dear, do not look so wretched; I hope and trust you will find nothing very terrible aches."

May lifted her sweet eyes to the lady's face.

"You don't know Gladys; she is the bravest, most unselfish girl; she wouldn't send for a doctor unless she were seriously ill, and I am sure she would not have let anyone telegraph to me if she had not been too ill to prevent it."

"And you won't see Diamond End after all," said the General kindly; "well, perhaps the next time you come to us we can manage it, and I tell you frankly the place is not what it used to be, its present *châtelineau* is a wet blanket."

May regretted that solemn promise to Gladys bitterly; if only she had not given it she could have told the General and Mrs. Anstruther her "sister" was the Gladys Keith they had so long mourned, and they would have better understood her anxiety; as it was she was bound to silence.

She could only thank her friends for their kindness and promise to write and let them know how she found Gladys.

The General himself drove her to the station, and it was only when she had said good-bye to him, and had fairly begun her long, lonely

journey, that May had leisure to remember she had not said good-bye to Owen Tudor and might never see him again.

It came as a great surprise to her to see Mr. Chester on the platform at King's Cross. She liked the Professor very much, and she knew he was really fond of Gladys, but that he should have spared time to come and meet his assistant's sister seemed an unlooked-for sacrifice.

"I have a great deal to tell you, Miss Nairn," he said, when they were driving off in a cab.

"Only tell me that Gladys is better."

"She is still alive," said the old man, "and Dr. Gill has hopes of her now. When he sent that telegram to you he thought her dying."

"And what is it?"

In a very few words Mr. Chester told her of the last night's tragedy. Every drop of blood seemed to leave May's face as she listened.

"My poor little Gladys—I ought never to have left her alone."

"It could have been no ordinary robbery," said the Professor, "for, so far as we can tell, no valuables have been taken."

"There were none to take," said May, "but what was the object if not robbery?"

"We think, at least Mr. Barton suggests, the man was looking for some papers. The drawers of the writing-table were taken out and emptied, a desk has evidently been ransacked. The theory is that Gladys disturbed the man at his evil work and he stabbed her to prevent her raising an alarm."

May looked bewildered.

"I should have said till to-day that I had not an enemy in the world."

"The police declare that they are seeking a man answering to the description of the wretch I saw on the stairs. They say he is wanted for a robbery at Diamond End."

"Mr. Tudor has lost several valuables," replied May, "he told us so himself. His theory was that one member of a band of thieves had visited the house to spy out the land for the others. But even the advance guard took goods worth more than a hundred pounds."

"Mrs. Barton is nursing your sister," said the Professor, "she and her husband came up last night, alarmed at the cry. I think you only know them slightly, but they seem very anxious about my poor little friend."

It came suddenly back to May that this was the 19th of December, the Professor's very busiest season was approaching, what would he do without his assistant?

"Don't think of me," said the kind old man as she began to express her sympathy. "It is a busy time, and there are few girls so bright and taking as your pretty sister, but the school holidays have begun now, and I've no doubt I'll find some under-teacher who will be glad to earn a trifle."

May put one hand on the Professor's as the cab stopped; a sudden awful fear had seized her.

"You saw the man yourself," she breathed.

"I saw him as close as I see you now. What is it, Miss May, tell me what you are thinking! you may trust me to keep your secret."

"It was only," the poor girl's breath came in gasps; she could hardly get out the words—"Gladys has had a great deal of trouble, and—people are so cruel you know. If we can't find the man then they will say she did it herself."

"I'd knock anyone down who said it," said the Professor, more fiercely than May had thought he could speak, kind old man. "No, my dear, don't you go to worry over that, there's no such thing possible. I've not a shadow of doubt the man was there ransacking the place, and when your sister surprised him he stabbed her to prevent her giving the alarm."

May said no more, in her own heart she felt no thief would have imagined he should find valuables in that cheap little flat. How she wished the Brandons had been at home. She felt so utterly helpless and lonely. Then a bright thought struck her. As the Professor said, all the schools had broken up, or would do so in a day or two, she would write to dear Miss Primrose and beg her kind old friend to come and help her.

Mrs. Barton met her at the door. The Professor lingered to hear the last report of Gladys, and then withdrew.

"She is sleeping peacefully," said the kind, motherly woman to May. "Dr. Gill hopes we shall pull her through, but he says it is a terrible wound, and she will need the utmost care. She was delicious all last night. I would not let anyone but myself and the doctor see her to-day, lest the delirium should return."

She looked into May's eyes, and Miss Nairn knew that poor Gladys had betrayed her own secret.

"It is quite true," May said, in answer to Mrs. Barton's glance, "Gladys is not my sister, but she and I are alone in the world. She was most anxious to hide herself from some friends who had treated her cruelly, and I thought she would be safer if I called her my sister and shared my name with her. We were two lonely girls, I thought we might be happier together."

Mrs. Barton stooped and kissed her.

"I think it was the kindest thing you could have done, Miss Nairn, and don't you be afraid of my betraying you; I won't tell even my own husband. But, don't you think this gives a clue to the man who injured Gladys?"

"No. I know her whole history, and there is no one in her past who answers to the Professor's description of the man on the stairs. The strangest part is that this very man is suspected of a robbery at Diamond End, close to where I have been staying."

An hour or two later Gladys opened her eyes and found her adored sister watching by her side. A strange look of intense thankfulness came into the beautiful eyes, as she whispered,—

"Oh, May, darling, are you safe? was my letter in time to warn you?"

"I am quite safe, dearie; it is you who have been in danger, little Gladys. I must never go away and leave you again."

Gladys looked wistfully into her face.

"They tell me I mustn't talk, but May, I can't rest till I have told you all."

May held the little feverish hand in hers.

"Mrs. Barton has gone home, dear, and I am head nurse. I really think it will hurt you less to speak than to brood over things; so tell me what troubles you so?"

She had expected to hear the description of the man who had confronted Gladys with that terrible stab; but Gladys clasped her hands and told May the history of her dream, of how she had heard Mrs. Montague speaking to herself by the lake, and of the cruel threat she had breathed against May.

Miss Nairn looked very grave.

"Gladys, do you know, I fancied before Mrs. Montague did not like me for she never sent any confirmation of Arline's invitation, and Mrs. Anstruther told me she was a most peculiar woman. The only person she has really 'taken to' is the surgeon, Mr. Douglas; she persists in having him at Diamond End continually, though none of her children can bear him; and, short of forbidding him the house, Mr. Tudor has done his utmost to stop his visits."

Gladys shuddered.

"May, I was so frightened, I seemed to think you would go there, and my dream be fulfilled. What should I do without you, dear?"

"Now, Gladys, you are to keep yourself as quiet as possible. I have written to my dear old schoolmistress, Miss Primrose, and begged her to come and stay with us. I shall tell her nothing of your history, except that you are a dear friend of mine, and that I have adopted you as a sister. She is such a kind old lady, and, as it's holiday time, I am sure she will come. She will tell me how to nurse you, and talk to the doctor, and all that."

"But where will she sleep?" asked Gladys, which practical question had never occurred to May.

"Oh, I'll get her a room somewhere. Now, deary, do try and go to sleep."

For a few minutes there was perfect silence, and May hoped her patient was obeying orders, then those sweet eyes opened slowly and there was a look of terror in them which cut the elder girl to the heart.

"Oh, May, save me! He is going to kill me! See, he has auntie's dagger. . . . We used to tell her it was dangerous."

May bent over Gladys in an agony; evidently the delirium had returned. She knew that the weapon which had wounded her darling had been picked up blood-stained on the stairs, a strange weapon—a rich trifle, made for ornament rather than use—and set with precious stones.

May knew a paper-knife in the form of a dagger, set with jewels, had been stolen from Diamond End. Gladys' words seemed to identify it strangely.

May's one thought was for the girl who had grown so dear to her. But when the doctor paid his evening visit and spoke gravely of the patient's state, a terrible conflict arose in the nurse's heart. She alone knew that her adopted sister was the Gladys Keith for whom half Northshire was mourning.

If the worst happened, and Gladys were dying, surely she would be absolved from that terrible promise; surely if the spark of life were really expiring, Gladys would like to see one familiar face—hear one dearly-loved voice!

"I cannot speak hopefully," was the doctor's verdict. "She is a very delicate girl, and even before last night she was suffering from some shock. I am afraid she has not strength enough to battle with the exhaustion following such a loss of blood."

May looked at him piteously.

"Oh, sir, save her—I want her so!"

"I will do my utmost," he said, kindly. "I never had a patient in whom I felt more interest; but, Miss Nairn, it would be cruel to buoy you up with false hopes, and I am very much afraid the case is beyond all human skill."

He was gone. May longed to bury her face in her hands and sob out her grief, but she dared not give herself this relief. Dr. Gill's last words were that Gladys must not be agitated; so, telling her patient she was going to tidy up the little sitting-room, and make it more fit for visitors' eyes, May set herself to repair the disorder created by that nocturnal intruder.

Her desk had evidently been overhauled; but then, as her mother had never written her a single line, and she had no schoolgirl correspondents, it followed that there were no letters received before she left Miss Primrose, and the few she had kept since were chiefly of a business nature. Her bank-book, her little stock of ready money, had both been left intact. A letter from Miss Primrose had evidently been carefully perused; it was one in which the dear old lady groaned over May's being "in a shop," and remarked it was enough to make the Leighs of Woodborough ashamed of their neglect to see what had happened to their descendant, and she really feared her dear May had inherited plebeian tastes from her father. Across this letter had been scored in a man's hand, in pencil, "If Miss Nairn is wise she will not heed this foolish woman. Honest, hard work is all she has to look forward to. She need expect nothing from the Leighs or from her father's family. To be happy and successful she should forget her father's very name and never try to trace his relations.—ONE WHO KNOWS."

May sank back into a chair.

For the first time she began to believe that she might really have been the cause of the strange intrusion. She knew nothing of her father, but she had always clung to the idea that he lived she might have been proud of him. It had been her dream—her debt to Mr. Page once paid—that she might wander through the world seeking some one who could tell her her father's history.

So far from being turned from her purpose by this strange warning, it only made her more fiercely set on it. A strange suspicion flashed across the girl: if her father had not been the obscure drawing-master Miss Primrose believed him, but the heir of a noble family, why—she was his only child and representative.

Bit by bit the dream pieced itself out in May's mind. Admit that her father was of good family, he might not have been the eldest son. When his relations refused to receive his widow and child, or afford them any help, there might have been several lives between him and the family honours; but (as she had seen in the case

of Owen Tudor) fortunes did sometimes belong to people who never expected them. If such a fortune was waiting for her, what more likely than that the people who would own it if she never claimed it should try to make her believe her father poor and obscure.

The man with the dagger might be in their employ, and have come to Tregarchan Mansions to see if May had any proofs of her parentage, any certificates which would substantiate her claims: this theory would explain why the desk had been ransacked.

Well, Miss Primrose would come soon, and might, perhaps, throw a little light on the search; but, deep in May's own heart, was the certainty that she had hit on the right theory.

And then a cry from the inner room reached her, and she flew to her adopted sister. Gladys was sitting up in bed, a feverish brightness in her eyes. She did not seem to recognise May or even to see her; it was as though she were talking to someone very far away.

"Oh Duke, my darling, come back! Oh, Duke, it was all a mistake and I loved you after all!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARNADUKE BLAKE could not be said to be travelling solely for business or pleasure. His trip was a strange combination of both. A literary man, his works were much sought after, and books of travels, or descriptions of places he had visited, found ready publishers; so that, in the heart-sickness which followed his disappointment, he left England as much to distract his thoughts from his lost love as for the sake of what he might gain in the way of inspiration for his pen.

He went to Australia first, and was delighted with the vast unknown continent. Travelling from one division to another, making friends, and receiving a warm welcome wherever he came, for Colonials dearly love to entertain the English aristocracy, and so far from sharing the English objection to being put in a book, they often think it a special honour, when told a guest meditates writing a work on their country on his return.

Duke liked the Southern hemisphere uncommonly. It was rather disturbing to his ideas to find the weather growing hotter and the days getting longer as the year wore to its close; but he thoroughly enjoyed the Australian spring, and had quite made up his mind for once in his life to be too hot at Christmas; and then he came across an old schoolfellow of his, who was running a farm near Gimpey, and induced his old friend to go home with him on a long visit.

Everyone for miles round knew the Fletchers, and the Fletchers' guest speedily became popular.

Duke found himself invited to every house within riding distance, and oftentimes of all to the homestead of Mr. Page, the richest man in that part of the country, who yet managed to inspire Duke with a strong aversion.

"I can't explain it," he told pretty Mrs. Fletcher one day; "but I do detest that fellow. His wife looks so miserable, you know, I can't help thinking he's a bit of a tyrant in domestic life."

"He's an out-and-out good fellow," replied Duke's hostess, "and I believe he worships the ground she walks on; but, I grant you, Mrs. Page looks unhappy, and I fancy I am the only woman in the township who knows why."

"Is it a secret?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, because you don't live in Gimpey. I found it out by an accident. We are very intimate with the Pages; and when my little girl was born five years ago I asked Mrs. Page to be her godmother, and mentioned we were going to call baby May. She burst into tears, poor thing, and I suppose, womanlike, I began to cry too; and then she told me she had left a little girl in England called May. To this day I don't know where the child is or her age or anything about her. The Pages have been out fourteen years, so unless she was a baby when they left her she must be growing up."

"Do you mean they deserted their own child?"

"She isn't his child. Mrs. Page was a widow. I fancy her first husband was something disreputable. Anyway, when she married again the condition was made that she gave up the little girl."

"And you think she regrets her?"

"I am sure of it. She has six children now, but only the two youngest are girls. I believe she misses the firstborn more and more every year. I think she can't forgive herself for deserting Mary. I suppose it comes to that."

"Didn't you tell me Mrs. Page was English?"

"Oh, yes; one of the Leighs of Woodborough. Mr. Page doesn't forget to tell you that either. He's just the man to tell people his wife's grandfather was an English Baronet."

"I know the Leighs," said Duke; "the present Baronet is a great crony of my father's."

"Well, you must leave off thinking Mr. Page a tyrant. He would give his wife gold to eat, he would half kill himself in her service if needful; but the one thing he won't and can't do, is to see his rival's child in his home."

It happened that not very long after this conversation Duke was over at the Pages' farm, and accidentally giving his ankle a nasty sprain, it was declared by his host he must not think of going back to Holmeford. They would send a note to Mr. Fletcher, and he must put up with their company for a few days.

Duke noticed that Mrs. Page warmly endorsed her husband's invitation. Usually she was rather colourless, seeming to take no interest in anything; but it was evident from her manner she wished Duke to remain, and this was reassuring, to him, as he knew, through the farmer's many outdoor engagements, his entertainment would mainly fall on her.

She brought her work on to the verandah the second afternoon, when Duke was lying on a basket lounge, the injured foot carefully bandaged up. He put away his newspaper, and began to talk to her about the beauties of the homestead, and his admiration for Australia generally.

"I can understand anyone without near ties in England being well content to forsake the old country and make a home here."

Mrs. Page shook her head.

"I fancy women feel differently. However happy and prosperous they are out here, there are times when they get a strange sense of homesickness. A yearning for the sight of a peaceful English village, or the bustling throbbing pulse of great London."

"Perhaps you are right. I am no free agent. I could not settle out here if I would, for my father and mother are both living and would not spare me for long."

"Mrs. Fletcher was telling me," her voice sank to a whisper, "that you knew my grandfather."

"I don't think I knew Sir Angus. I know the present baronet—your uncle, I presume."

"I wish you would tell me something about him," said Mrs. Page, eagerly. "Is he married? Has he children?"

"He had one son, a regular scapegrace, who did something very shady, and joined with his father to cut off the entail."

"Ah," she seemed to hesitate. "I was not thinking of money, Mr. Blake, or of any chance of my being his heiress. You can't understand, but you seem kind, and there is no one else I can ask. Tell me, do you think Sir Gilbert and Lady Leigh would be kind to a young girl. Would they be good to a lonely child just because she was of their blood, if they knew of her?"

Duke shook his head.

"They are both getting very old," he said, gravely. "Sir Gilbert is turned seventy, his wife is very little younger. My fear is they are so engrossed in themselves and their own petty ailments their hearts would not open to any fresh interests."

"Ah!" the tears had come into her eyes, "then it would be of no use."

"Were you thinking of sending one of your children to school in England?" asked Duke, "because I am sure my mother would be glad to



"I SUDDENLY HEARD A PIERCING SHRIEK, AND RUSHED UP TO FIND HER—THUS!" SAID THE PROFESSOR.

send you bulletins of the young lady, and do her best to make her exile happy. My mother loves all young people, and my father is so devoted to Sir Gilbert Leigh that any relation of his would be sure of a welcome with us."

Mona Page lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Mr. Blake, I am going to trust you with a secret. My eldest child is in England. My husband defrayed the expenses of her education, but refused to allow me to write to her. He wanted me to forget my firstborn, but I am not good at forgetting. Oh, you can't tell how my heart has yearned for her. I left her with a dear old teacher of my own, and I knew that she would be well cared for, but when she grew up and learned her own story, she was so indignant she refused to owe her maintenance to us any longer. She has left school and gone out into the world to earn her bread."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, the school mistress sent back my husband's draft with an intimation that May had left her and was in London. Oh, Mr. Blake, I know what London means to a lonely woman. Think of my child, she is quite young, only a girl in her teens. Think of her alone without a relation to acknowledge her or a friend in the world."

"But surely her father's family would be kind to her!"

"They were poor and proud. My husband's only brother died young, and his widow could not be expected to feel an interest in us. She would not help me nineteen years ago, is it likely she would help May now?"

Duke felt interested, because his own heart being sad for one lonely girl, it was but natural the sorrows of another should appeal to him. He took Mrs. Page's hand in his, and said kindly,—

"I shall be returning to England in a little while, if you like I will go and see your daughter (I suppose I can get her address at the school), I will tell her of her mother's love."

"Oh, if you only would."

"My mother shall ask her to Northshire," said Duke cheerfully, "and we will try to make her

happy. What! ashamed of her because she is earning her own living, not a bit of it, Mrs. Page; we Blakees are not like that."

"And you will tell her I have never ceased regretting that I gave her up. Tell her it has been the sorrow of my life."

"I will tell her," said Duke kindly, "and now it is nearly Mr. Page's time for coming home, don't you think you had better try and get a little calmer before he is here."

She smiled, and the smile made her pale face so lovely, Duke felt she must, indeed, have been beautiful before sorrow set its mark on her. He wondered what kind of man her first husband had been, and which parent May resembled.

"You won't forget your promise," pleaded Mrs. Page, "and, perhaps, you'd take May a present from me; nothing valuable—I should not dare to send her that, but just my portrait and a few trifles. It would ease my pain a little if I knew someone would tell the child how I loved her."

"I promise," said Duke, "and now I see Mr. Page in the distance, hadn't you better go indoors. I will try and keep him here talking to me for a few minutes, and that will give you time to compose yourself. Here is an English paper if you care to look at it."

"I thought the Misses was here," said Mr. Page, as he took a chair in the verandah, and told Duke it was getting hotter and hotter, he doubted there'd be a storm.

"She has only just gone in. She took an English newspaper with her, six weeks after date, but I suppose that is modern here."

"Quite," returned the farmer, "my wife will enjoy it. She loves everything English."

"And you."

"I never want to see England again," was the prompt reply. "Last time I was over I won my wife, and I felt then I'd got all out of the old country I wanted. No offence to you, sir, I'm proud to welcome an English guest, but to go back to the old country, with its narrow views and petty

cliques, after our wide, free, unfettered life out here—why, it would stifle me, Mr. Blake."

Mrs. Page joined them at tea with two red spots burning in her thin cheeks. Duke marvelled at the excitement in her manner, and hoped it was not due to their recent conversation. But her husband took it phlegmatically enough.

"She's often like that," he told his guest later, "I expect she's found a name she used to know in that paper of yours, and it's carried her back into the past. I wish with all my heart there was a stream called Lethe to be found nowadays. I'd get her some of the water if it cost me a small fortune."

"You think forgetfulness happiness?"

"I do—there's plenty to look forward to, I find, so why in the world should people continually be looking back."

"The problem is beyond me, sir."

Duke did not have another chance of a word alone with Mrs. Page that night. He fancied once she was trying to secure a *little à l'été*, but he did not second her efforts. He was ready to give her the help he had promised, but—not being a woman—he saw no use in going over and over the story of the past, and he thought silence kindest; he had not spoken another word alone to his hostess when he went to bed, and certainly his last waking thoughts were not of her story, and yet he fell asleep and dreamed that a girl called May Nairn had caught hold of his hand, and was trying to lead him somewhere against his will.

"You must come with me," she pleaded in a sweet clear voice, "for Gladys wants you. She is dying, and she cannot fall asleep until she has seen you once again."

(To be continued.)

CAMELS are, perhaps, the only animals that cannot swim; immediately after they enter the water they turn on their backs and are drowned.



ERIC ROSE AND PLACED A CHAIR FOR HIS CLIENT.

HIS STRANGE CLIENT.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

He was a young man and life had been very hard on him; he had a somewhat romantic history of his own which made him admit truth was sometimes stranger than fiction; add that he had a very kind heart and pitied every woman in distress, and you have the reasons which induced Eric Milton to take up the case of Mrs. Hawthorne.

Eric Milton had been brought up by his uncle, an old-established London lawyer.

Mr. Rawson was a widower, whose only son, after a rather disreputable career, went to Australia, and was never heard of again, so that Eric was regarded by everyone as his uncle's successor and heir of the very comfortable fortune the former had got together.

Alas for human expectations; Mr. Rawson died suddenly a month after Eric was "admitted," and before any deed of partnership had been drawn up; the scapegrace son appeared, no one quite knew from where, and there being no will took possession of everything, and announced his intention of carrying on his father's practice, with the assistance of the managing clerk, Maurice Howell.

There was no remedy; every creature in the office knew Mr. Rawson's intentions respecting his nephew, but intentions are not deeds. The returned prodigal had duly qualified as a solicitor before he left England, and his offences against home and morality all belonged to his private, not his professional character.

Maurice Howell, who was toady enough to worship the rising sun, declared promptly that "Mr. Frederic" was the right person to carry on things; a man of forty had more experience than

a youngster of twenty-four, and it stood to reason a son's claim was nearer than a nephew's.

Eric Milton had no redress; his cousin condescendingly offered him a clerkship at seventy pounds a year which he promptly refused; he removed his possessions from the old house in Bedford Square where he had spent so many happy years, and settled for the present at a boarding house out Bloomsbury way, partly because the proprietress was the mother of an old schoolfellow, partly because he hated the thought of London lodgings.

Eric was no coward, but he acknowledged his position looked bad enough; an expensive training had qualified him thoroughly for a profession he really loved, but he had no capital, he could not buy even a junior partnership, managing clerkships were hard to come by, and meanwhile the need was urgent, he must start some way of earning money at once.

"Set up for yourself, I'll send you all my business," said a shrewd, middle-aged merchant to him. "I'll do something more, if the initial expenses of rent, office furniture and so on is a difficulty, I'll advance you two hundred pounds."

Eric looked at him in amazement.

"Do you mean it, Mr. Dolby?"

"Rather! Why the world can't have dealt very generously with you, young man, for you to be so surprised. I think your uncle very much to blame for not making a will, but I really think he believed his son dead, and so can excuse him. As for Frederic Rawson he has treated you shamefully, and after his conduct to you I couldn't trust him with any of my business."

So Eric started for himself in two very small offices near Chancery Lane, and if it was a very up-hill fight, no doubt it was a far pleasanter life for him than if he had become his cousin's clerk.

He worked early and late, he kept no assistant but a small office boy; he threw his whole soul into the cases brought to him, and certainly his clients had every cause to be satisfied; but they

were few, and their business—except Mr. Dolby's—light.

It was all Eric could do to make both ends meet, and twelve months' after his uncle's death he looked years older than the gay, careless young fellow who had lived with Mr. Rawson in Bedford Square.

He heard of his cousin from time to time; being in the same profession and within a mile of him, he could hardly fail to do so.

Fred had taken the managing clerk, Maurice Howell, into partnership, and the two were said to be doing very well, though Mr. Rawson attended very little to office duties himself; he lived at his father's old house, but had an entirely fresh staff of servants, and went in for more show and luxury than the old lawyer had ever indulged in.

"But he can afford it," said Eric's informant. "Your uncle had saved a large fortune, and he had a first-rate connection, which it will take some years for his successor to altogether lose. Mind you, Mr. Milton, I don't believe your cousin will prosper in the long run, he trusts too much to that hatchet-faced partner of his; but at present he can afford to cut a dash."

And meanwhile Eric found the greatest difficulty in keeping his own head above water; and the young lady who, in old Mr. Rawson's lifetime, had promised one day to share his fortunes, calmly broke off the engagement, expressing (on a perfumed sheet of heliotrope note paper) her conviction that she was not fitted to become a poor man's wife, and she would not be a stumbling block in dear Eric's path, but remained ever, his friend and well-wisher.—ALICE SEYMOUR.

Eric crushed the note in his hand, and felt, perhaps, the bitterest pang he had suffered in all his troubles; but he was a brave fellow and he soon pulled himself together.

"I may be thankful my uncle died before our marriage," he thought; "it would have been terrible had Alice been bound to me, since she rates wealth so far above love. Well, I suppose I am well quit of her. A girl who could jilt a

fellow because he turned out poorer than she expected, is not worth a regret. But, how I loved her! I feel as if I could never believe in a woman's truth again."

He went back to his boarding-house with a heavy heart. Mrs. Mason, the kindly proprietress, felt troubled as she looked at the young man's pale, anxious face. She was a motherly soul and took a friendly interest in all the inmates; more than usual in Eric, perhaps, because he had been the close friend of her only son, the young curate, who had been cut off at twenty-five, leaving her to earn a living as best she might.

"You look so tired, Mr. Milton," she said to Eric after the seven o'clock dinner, when the other inmates were leaving the dining-room, and she had a chance of a word alone with her favorite, "don't you think you are working too hard?"

"Not hard enough," he answered, pleasantly; "efforts are few and far between, Mrs. Mason."

She led the way into her own little sitting-room which stood at the end of the hall, a tiny sanctum, but which had the rare merit of being cool on the very hottest days.

Eric took a chair by the window and heaved a sigh of relief as the sweet evening breeze came in and fanned his hot, tired face.

"You should take a holiday," went on the good lady, kindly, "this heat is knocking you up."

"I couldn't get away, and I've nowhere to go."

"Well, a Saturday to Monday at Chislehurst, would be better than nothing. You haven't been to the Firs to stay since Easter; aren't the Seymours at home?"

He looked at her and never flinched.

"They are at home, Mrs. Mason, but I have no invitation to visit them; I never shall have again. Miss Seymour thinks she is not fitted to marry a poor man, and as she has no faith in my ever becoming anything else, she wishes our engagement to cease."

The tears started to Mrs. Mason's eyes; in spite of the wear and tear of keeping twelve boarders she had a wonderful power of sympathy.

"The heartless girl!" she exclaimed; "but there, blaming her won't mend matters. If I were in your place, Mr. Milton, I know what I should do."

"Go down to Chislehurst? It would be of no use; Alice has made up her mind this time. There have been plenty of signs that ought to have warned me of it, but I was so blind I could not see them."

"I didn't mean go down to Chislehurst at all," corrected Mrs. Mason; "I should just make up my mind to get on so well that one of these days Miss Seymour might regret what she has thrown away."

Eric smiled half sadly.

"Haven't I tried to get on hard enough already? If I failed when I had the hope of her, am I likely to succeed now I have no aim in life to spur me on?"

"You mustn't talk like that," said Mrs. Mason, cheerfully; "it's a long lane that has no turning, and when once you take a start you'll get on like a house on fire. There are plenty of girls in the world quite as pretty as Miss Seymour. You will not be the brave young fellow I have always thought you if you sit down and fold your hands in despair just because a heartless coquette has jilted you; that would be a pretty triumph for her. If I were you I'd not let her say she spoils your life."

"I'm not going to give in," said Eric; "at least, not if I can help it. But we all have our 'blue' times, Mrs. Mason, and this is one of mine."

"Well," said the lady of the house, with a sigh, "I know I have 'blue' times: when one is almost in August (a month no fresh boarders come in), and knows there are four empty rooms, and rent and taxes going on just the same; why, it makes a woman feel down."

"Didn't you get any answers to the last advertisements?" asked Eric, who took a friendly interest in her hostess.

"Not a single one. It's a bad time. You see, the middle of July everyone is thinking of holi-

days at the seaside or in the country, not of seeking fresh quarters in London."

A loud knock at the front door passed almost unnoticed by Mrs. Mason and Eric. Each of the inmates possessed a latch-key; but Polgarth House was more of a home to those who lived there than a boarding-house usually is. The gentlemen often asked their friends to see them. There was a very good smoking-room, well supplied with newspapers and armchairs, where visitors could pass an hour very pleasantly.

But the tall "boy," who was boots, butler, and general factotum at Polgarth House, appeared at the door of his mistress's sanctum with a perplexed face.

"It's a lady, ma'am. She says she's come about the advertisement. The cab's piled up with luggage."

Ladies were not unknown at Polgarth House. Husbands and fathers spending a few weeks there in May or June brought their wives and daughters; one or two married couples had actually spent three months at a stretch with Mrs. Mason; and her prospectus always asserted that her pension was for "ladies and gentlemen," but this was the first time in her experience that one of the gentler sex had arrived alone unexpectedly and accompanied by her luggage.

"You had better see the lady here," said Eric, coming to the rescue; "the drawing-room is pretty full to-night, and I'll vanish."

The stranger whom Herbert ushered into the little sanctum was another surprise to Mrs. Mason. She was so young that she would easily have passed for nineteen, but for a sad, rather wistful expression. She was beautifully dressed in a soft grey travelling costume; a small black bonnet rested gracefully on her golden-brown hair, and though evidently weary, and unused to business transactions, she spoke to Mrs. Mason with a gentle dignity which went to the widow's heart.

"I never was in England before," the stranger said, quietly. "I only landed at Southampton this morning. I had thought of going to an hotel; but a lady on the steamer told me I should be more comfortable at a boarding-house. She wrote down the address of two or three, and I came to you first, because I saw from an advertisement you had vacancies."

"I have several vacancies," said Mrs. Mason, gravely; "but I almost fear my house would not suit you. Most of my boarders are City gentlemen, away all day. I have very little leisure myself, and I fear a young lady coming alone would find it a very dull home."

"Mrs. Buchanan said you would be kind to me," said the girl, anxiously. "I should not feel quite among strangers if I came here. Won't you try me for a month, Mrs. Mason? I have no references, for all my friends live abroad; but I could pay in advance; and Mrs. Buchanan gave me her husband's card. Of course they know nothing of me, except that we were fellow travellers; but—"

"I shall be very pleased for you to come and see how you like us," said Mrs. Mason, kindly; "and there is no need to think of paying in advance. Let me show you the rooms I have vacant. If you find we are too dull and prosy for you, you can leave at the end of a week."

"I am sure you will not be that. I wanted to be right in London, not in the suburbs, because I have so much to do."

She selected the smallest of the three rooms, evidently influenced by the fact that it was also the cheapest. The luggage was carried up, and Mrs. Mason offered supper in her own room if she was too tired to come down; but the girl shook her head.

"I dined at Southampton, thank you, and shall want nothing more to-night."

Mrs. Mason was about to leave her when a thought struck her.

"Will you tell me your name, please. I always like the servants to know who is staying with me in case of letters and callers."

"I do not expect any letters, and I am sure I shall have no callers," said the new boarder frankly, "but my name is Barbara Hawthorne."

Arrived downstairs, Mrs. Mason gave some

orders to the page about Miss Hawthorne's comfort, but the boy calmly corrected her.

"She's Mrs. Hawthorne, ma'am, at least, that was on the labels of her luggage."

The boarding-house proprietress stared. "You must be mistaken, Herbert."

But the boy persisted. The labels had rather interested him, as he had a brother who had emigrated to Australia, and was living at Sydney, the very port at which Mrs. Hawthorne had embarked for England.

"She must have married when she was a child," decided Mrs. Mason. "She doesn't look twenty now, and where in the world is her husband? He must be mad to let such a lovely young creature go roving about the world alone."

Breakfast was a lingering meal at Mrs. Mason's. It began at eight when the City clerks set the example of punctuality, and was to be had at any time from then till half-past nine, when the table was cleared. Most of the boarders, however, were early birds, and it was rare that anyone came down later than half-past eight, so that when Mrs. Hawthorne appeared at nine o'clock she found the big dining-room unoccupied except by her hostess, who, in her morning dress of black and white flowered delaine, looked a very kind motherly personage.

Barbara Hawthorne, in a white cambric trimmed with embroidery, was quite a vision of youthful beauty.

Mrs. Mason glanced instinctively to her left hand, and had to bow to Herbert's superior wisdom, for there on the third finger was a broad gold wedding-ring. The widow felt bewildered, it was so passing strange that a man should part from so beautiful a young wife needlessly, and the choice of the cheapest bedroom hardly suited that lovely embroidered robe, for the washing of which a London laundress would certainly charge half-a-crown.

"I hope you are rested," said Mrs. Mason kindly. "I think you told me you had never been in England before."

"Never. I am Australian born. I am perfectly rested, thank you. I am so glad to be safely in England at last."

There were black ribbons at her throat and round her waist. Mrs. Mason remembered she had worn a black bonnet the night before, and said kindly,—

"I hope you are not mourning a near relation, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"My mother," and a tear stood in the beautiful blue-grey eyes; "she died just three months ago, and I promised her solemnly I would come to England about some family business. I was not sorry to come, I felt so terribly lonely in Australia when I had lost her."

"But your husband," exclaimed Mrs. Mason at the risk of being thought impudent "how could he spare you?"

"My husband died two years ago. He was very very good to me," said the girl simply. "But we had only been married a week, and I knew, when I married him, he was dying. I think he wanted to feel sure I was provided for. He left me all he had, poor Fred."

After this Mrs. Mason felt prepared for anything. If this child were indeed a two-years' widow it seemed to the worthy landlady she should never be surprised at anything again.

Barbara finished her breakfast, and then wandered to the window, where she stood looking out into the square, whose dusty shrubs and drooping flowers told plainly of the unusual heat of that particular summer.

"I suppose," and Mrs. Hawthorne looked a little anxious, "one can go out any time and walk anywhere."

Mrs. Mason felt puzzled.

"I think you will find walking in London very tiring, because the streets are generally so crowded. Did you want to go anywhere special?"

"Yes," said Barbara, decidedly. "I want to go and see a lawyer."

"But what lawyer, my dear? There are so many."

"I don't know. I thought I could look in a directory; but if there are so many I might get

puzzled. Mother said, "Find an honest lawyer who has time to listen to you," she thought some of the English lawyers were so busy they would never trouble about a stranger."

"I know one lawyer," said Mrs. Mason, "who would have time, and who is as honest as the day, Mr. Eric Milton. He has lived here for the last year, and I never want to meet a more straightforward fellow. You might go and see him, and if he couldn't undertake the business himself he would be able to recommend you to someone else."

"Where does he live?" asked Barbara. "I mean, where does he see his clients? I'll go round now."

"His offices are at Trafalgar Chambers. You can take an omnibus to Chancery-lane, and then you'll be close. But he will be home at seven if you would rather see him here."

"I would rather go to him," said Mrs. Hawthorne, gravely; "thank you very much for telling me of him."

Mrs. Mason longed to suggest that the white embroidered cambric was not suited to the expedition; but she was glad she had kept silent, when Barbara came down in a soft black cashmere, which set off her dazzlingly fair complexion, while a large picture lace hat, trimmed with white roses completed a costume so attractive that Mrs. Mason decided Barbara Hawthorne, whether widow or not, was certainly a beauty.

CHAPTER II.

"A LADY to see you, sir!"

Eric looked up to find the boy clerk regarding him with open-mouthed surprise. It was the first time so fair a vision had come to the office since he had held his present post.

"A lady, Joe?" asked Eric, who had visions of one of the tall gaunt females who visit offices from time to time with bogus subscription lists.

"Bless you, yes sir," responded Joe, "and a real tiptopper!"

He ushered in the "real tiptopper," and closed the door.

Eric rose and placed a chair for his client, wondering much what she could possibly require at his hands.

"My name is Hawthorne," she said, simply, "and I am staying at Polgarth House. Mrs. Mason thought you might possibly assist me in some legal business which has brought me to England. I am Australian born and bred, so I understand far less of English law than your own countrywomen. My husband is dead, and I am practically alone in the world."

Eric felt strangely touched by the last words. Barbara Hawthorne's beauty had in it something so youthful and pathetic that she seemed a creature made to be taken care of and guarded at every turn from life's rough travels. To think of her as so utterly alone, that she had crossed the ocean by herself to make her home among strangers was hard.

"I shall be happy to advise you to the very best of my power, Mrs. Hawthorne," he said, earnestly. "Will you tell me the case in question?"

"Yes," she blushed crimson. "But, first, I ought to tell you that I am not rich now. I have I think enough to keep me in England for a year, and sufficient over to take me back to Australia if I fail, and leave a hundred pounds for legal expenses; but if it should cost more than that I—I haven't got it."

Eric smiled, he really could not help it, the confession was so naive.

"If you will tell me everything, I can give you my opinion whether you have a promising case; I don't think you need worry about the pecuniary part of it yet."

"I hardly know where to begin," said Barbara; "I shall have to go back a long way to make it clear, and that will take up so much of your time."

"I can give you the whole morning," he answered with imprudent frankness, "for I have no other appointments. Tell me the story in your own way."

"My mother was a very beautiful woman," began Barbara, "and the very best one who ever lived, but my father was a no-good fellow; he had done lots of things that might have landed him in prison if he had been caught; but in those days we lived in the Bush, in a very wild, lawless place, where people did pretty much as they liked, so that he escaped; but there was one man who knew his character and had some secret of his in his power; this man's name was James Walters, he was over forty, an Englishman down on his luck, and, I do believe, as big a scoundrel as ever lived."

"You have not told me your father's name," said Eric, who was carefully making notes on a sheet of paper.

"Robert Brown, but it won't help you."

"I beg your pardon; I will not interrupt again."

She seemed to find it difficult to go on, and Eric noticed her face was dyed a deep crimson, and that she steadily avoided meeting his eyes.

"I was nineteen, and this Walters admired me, or said he did; any way, he wanted to marry me, and promised on our wedding day he would give up the proofs he had of my father's crimes. My mother was dead against the match, and I—well, I hated Walters, but I seemed powerless to help myself. I had no friends near, and my father had always been a tyrant; at last I was nearly giving in when Mr. Hawthorne came. I had known him since I was a little child. He had taught me everything I knew, and though I did not love him I would have trusted him sooner than anyone in the world."

"I told him my story, and he promised to take me to Sydney where he had friends who would help me to earn my living. We did not tell my mother, we thought it would make things easier for her with my father, if she did not know what had become of me. . . . There was an accident. . . . I can't tell you more; but when we got to Sydney it was a dying man who was carried to the house of Mr. Hawthorne's friends."

"He knew he had not many days to live and he begged me to marry him, that, as his widow, I might inherit all he left, and so be free to live away from my father. We were married one week, day for day, before Fred died."

She spoke with strong emotion, and Eric felt a deep pity for her even while he had not a notion where her need of legal aid came in; he kept perfectly silent, and presently she went on again.

"I had a long illness then. I suppose it was the shock of all I had gone through from my father's persecution. When I was well enough to understand things, the Parkers—they had kept me with them all the time—told me that my father had been to Sydney, but they had refused to give me up; then, acting in my name, as I was a minor, he had been to the bank and tried to draw out Fred's money, but from some wonderful chance, he could not find out where it was invested. My husband had told several people of his making ten thousand pounds; this was the sum he had mentioned to me, but no one, not even the Parkers, had an idea where it was placed; save that I was Mrs. Hawthorne instead of Barbara Brown, all was as though that strange sad wedding had never been."

"And your mother?" asked Eric.

"I'm coming to that. After my flight, my father and Walters made up their differences; the former had come into some money, we never knew how till afterwards, and bribed Walters to hold his tongue."

"My father and mother came down to Sydney and took a house there; they seemed very well off, and after a time I went back to them. Walters had disappeared; and I think, perhaps, that was the happiest year of my life. Then my father died, and confessed, with his last breath, he had stolen Fred's ten thousand pounds; he and Walters knew his writing, and together they forged an order for the amount skillfully. While he was going to all the banks in Sydney and pretending to be anxious about my money, he and Walters had divided the spoil."

"It was abominable!" said Eric, hotly; "it was shameful!"

"There's not much more to tell," said Bar-

bara. "James Walters sailed for England directly after my father's death; and then my mother's health began to fail; and when she knew her end was near, she told me the truth. I was her child, but not the child of the man who had robbed and ill-treated me. She was a widow when she married Robert Brown, and my own father was an Englishman—Clive Adair—for marrying whom her own family had cast her off. They were rich and great, and she said she thought that, after all these years, her parents must surely have forgiven her. She had never breathed a word of them while Robert Brown lived. She said she should have died of shame had her father ever seen her second husband; but she believed, for her sake, he would receive me. She said I was the image of herself when she left her English home, and for old sake's sake they would be good to me. She said I should find all the proofs of her story in a little writing-desk in her room, and she died before she had told me even her father's name."

Eric Milton stared.

"And the papers?"

"The desk was empty. Mr. Milton, don't ask me for proofs of *how I know it*. I can't give them you; but I am as certain James Walters stole those papers as I am that I am sitting here."

"His object?" asked the lawyer, thoughtfully.

"To be revenged on me. The last time I ever saw him he swore that he would make me bitterly repent crossing his will. It was not enough that by a skilful forgery he and Robert Brown possessed themselves of the fortune my husband left me; it was not enough that for years he had been the curse of our domestic peace—James Walters was more like a fiend than a man; and this was his revenge. He had robbed me once of my husband's fortune, he resolved to rob me a second time of what I valued more than wealth—the proofs of my descent from an honest English family. I promised my dying mother I would come to England, and never rest until I had found her father; and now, though the difficulties in my path are ten times greater through the loss of these papers, I mean to keep my word."

Eric looked at her with a smile of admiration for her courage.

"You mustn't think," went on Mrs. Hawthorne, with a strange, dreamy smile, "that it's only money I want. I'm not so very fond of money, and I know I've enough, anyway, to take me back to Sydney, where I can earn my living easily, and where the Parkers would give me a home as long as I wanted it. It's not money so much as the longing to feel I'm not quite alone in the world—the longing for someone belonging to me I can feel proud of. Almost as soon as I knew anything at all I was ashamed of my father, as I thought Robert Brown then. And, though I worshipped my dear mother, I pitied and loved rather than looked up to her. My husband, poor fellow, I knew well enough had come out from England 'under a cloud,' and was cast off by his father. I don't mind working for my bread if my English relations don't offer me a home; but oh! I'd like just for once to feel I could hold my head up and say I belonged to folks who had nothing to be ashamed of."

She stopped abruptly; her excitement had well-nigh broken down her strength, and she trembled like a leaf.

"I understand," said Eric, kindly; "I think I know just how you feel. And now will you try and be calm, and answer me a few business questions?"

"Yes," she took out a little leather pocket book, extracted two papers from it, and placed them in his hand.

"I got these in Sydney—I know they throw no light on my mother's family, but at least they prove that I am not Robert Brown's daughter."

They were two certificates, one of the baptism of Barbara, child of Helen and Clive Adair; and the other, dated two years later, of the marriage of Helen Clive, widow, and Robert Brown, bachelor; of this last ceremony James Walters was one of the attesting witnesses.

"I am glad you have these," said the young

lawyer. "Don't you see, Mrs. Hawthorne, if you can find any of the Adairs, they will naturally know whom their relative married."

Barbara shook her head.

"I believe my father was an orphan without any near kindred. I thought it might be possible to advertise for the certificate of his marriage, it must have been just before mother left England, and that was in the autumn of seventy."

"Meaning the Australian autumn?"

"No, the English one, for I have heard my mother say she landed only a few weeks before Christmas. I believe she was married immediately before sailing, but in any case it would not have been long before."

Eric Milton looked thoughtful.

"An advertisement addressed to parish clerks and others, for the marriage certificate of Clive Adair, supposed to have been married in the summer or early autumn of 1870, and offering a reward of five pounds. That seems our best plan."

"And you think I have a case?"

He looked at her pityingly.

"My dear lady, it would be far easier if we could find James Walters, and bully or persuade him into giving up those papers."

"He would never give them up without force—If I threatened to prosecute him for forging my husband's name, it might do some good, but then we have first to find him, and it seems easier to find my grandfather."

Eric Milton hesitated.

"Have you any idea if your mother was an only child?"

"She had two brothers and one younger sister; there was a gap between the boys and mother, they were grown up when she was a child. Poor mother, she was only forty when she died, and yet for years and years she had looked and seemed quite old."

"If she was forty and her oldest brother say fifty, that would bring the father to over seventy. Do you see what I mean, Mrs. Hawthorne? An old gentleman would remember every circumstance of his child's disappearance, and be quick to notice an advertisement bearing her husband's name; but if he and his wife were dead, brothers and sisters would not feel the same interest."

She shook her head sadly.

"Wouldn't they?"

"I fear not. Twenty-two years is a long time to remember a sister never seen or heard of in them. Your uncles and aunts may be married with grown-up children of their own, and have well-nigh forgotten the sister who disappeared so long ago."

Mrs. Hawthorne looked up at him, saying,—

"Do you think it's hopeless?"

"Not hopeless," he answered gently, "but I fear it is a long and difficult task. I will issue the advertisement, and I propose to see a skilful detective and give him a full and particular description of James Walters, if you can furnish it with the date he left Australia. If the man is really a queer customer, depend upon it some of the police will know something of him."

Barbara shook her head.

"He is bad to the very core," she said; "he was always doing shady things, but he never got found out. He left Sydney a year ago last April. I know he sailed under his own name, and I can tell you the name of his vessel—it was the *Southern Queen*."

Milton carefully made notes of this, then, as Mrs. Hawthorne rose up to go, he asked,—

"Did you say you were staying at Polgarth House?"

"Yes, I only landed in England last night, and a lady I met on the steamer told me of Mrs. Mason's, so I thought I should feel less strange there than at an hotel."

"Mrs. Mason is one of the kindest women in the world. I have lived with her over a year—but it is a dull house for a young lady."

Barbara raised her beautiful eyes half reproachfully to his face.

"I am not a young lady, Mr. Milton. I feel more like forty than twenty-one, and I don't think I could bear to be anywhere very lively so soon after mother's death. I only want a quiet

place to wait in while you try and find out my grandfather. How long do you think it will take?"

Eric opened his eyes.

"I can't give you the least idea. If anything comes of the advertisement the rest would be easy. If that brings no answer the case will be far more complicated. You have no idea you see of your grandfather's social position."

"I told you he came of a good old family."

"But you do not know if he was a nobleman."

If he were I might get a peerage for the year preceding your mother's marriage, and make a note of all the nobles who had a daughter called Helen. Then searching through the succeeding years we should come on the fate of these ladies, until we found one with the entry, 'Married Clive Adair.'

Barbara shook her head mournfully.

"He was a rich man. They had carriages and horses, and servants. I'm not sure, but I think mother was presented at Court. I know when she came out my grandmother gave her a pearl necklace, and she took it away with her, not because of its value, but because it was her mother's last present."

"Have you got it now?"

"My stepfather took good care his wife should possess no valuables. She kept the clasp for years. It was with the papers I told you of, and no doubt passed with them into James Walter's hands."

Milton looked at her intently.

"I should say you were a good hater, Mrs. Hawthorne. How you loathe that man, why the very tone of your voice alters when you speak of him."

"I do hate him," she answered passionately; "it may seem to you vindictive, and unwomanly, but I think I would give almost anything in the world to be revenged on James Walters. Almost ever since I can remember he was the black shadow on our home. Weak as my stepfather was, I don't think he would have been quite such a worthless creature but for Walter's influence over him. I have my mother's wrongs to avenge you see, as well as my own."

CHAPTER III.

If Eric Milton found clients few and business rather slack, his cousin, Frederic Rawson, had, so far, no cause for either complaint. As yet the practice got together by his energetic hard-working father, still flourished. Here and there fair-minded men, like Mr. Dolby, had withdrawn their custom; but the great majority seeing the old clerks still there, and everything apparently on the same footing, thought all must be well, and adopted Maurice Howell's theory that a son was nearer than a nephew, and Eric Milton having usurped his cousin's place for a good many years, had no right to complain now. So things went well in Oak Tree Court, and money came in apace; yet the expression on the face of the senior partner was hardly a satisfied one as he entered the office suddenly one July day, passed through to the private room where Maurice Howell now reigned supreme, and sank panting into a chair.

"Man alive!" exclaimed Howell, who in private treated his partner with but scant respect, "what's the matter? you look as if you had seen a ghost."

Rawson's teeth were chattering, and his knees trembling, despite the summer heat, but he resisted the suggestion.

"It's only fools believe in ghosts, but I've had a bit of a shock; get me some brandy, quick, I say."

Howell watched him rather uneasily, unlocked a cupboard, took out a bottle, and pouring a small quantity of brandy into a glass, brought it to Frederic.

"That's better," said the other when he had drained it; "there's nothing like brandy for pulling a fellow together."

"It's a remedy you fly to too often," returned the other. "Now tell me what's the matter."

"Nothing."

"I'm not a fool, nor are you," was the prompt reply. "I know you were in a confounded funk when you came in here, and I don't think you'd put yourself into one for nothing, so you'd better tell me what's up. We're partners you know, so your risk is mine."

"You'd be welcome to the whole of the risk," said Rawson, bitterly, "There's nothing the matter, really; only I saw someone like—it couldn't have been the girl herself—someone I used to know."

"Out yonder!" said Howell, moving his eyes in a direction which might have stood for any distant country, but was vague—very.

"Out yonder! Bless you, Howell, it can't be she. There's nothing likely to bring her to England; but it gave me a turn, that's all."

"And if she were the lady she so closely resembles, would the consequences be unpleasant, eh?"

"Uncommonly."

"Perhaps she's a legal claim on you," said Howell. "You may be shilly-shallying with my daughter because you've left a ready-made Mrs. Rawson the other side of the water. Plain speaking pays best in the long run—is that the tale, eh?"

"No, it isn't," said Fred Rawson, and both his voice and manner seemed genuine. "I've never been married in my life. I don't say I never proposed to a girl, but there's not a woman in the world, this side of the equator or the other, who has a right to come forward and forbid my banns."

"That's well," said Howell, in a relieved tone; "but then, what are you waiting for? Meg's twenty-two and you're well over forty. You've been engaged some months, and yet I hear nothing about fixing the day."

"It's not my fault," said the other sullenly. "Goodness knows I'm not anxious for a wife, and I've no taste for bread and butter misuses; but since the thing has got to be done one time as good as another to me. I shall leave Mrs. Rawson to keep house in Bedford-square while I take a short trip on the continent. You won't expect me to make a very devoted husband; but—it's the lady's privilege to name the day, and Miss Margaret shall not be balked of it through any impatience of mine."

"I'll talk to Meg to-night," returned Maurice Howell.

There were plenty of people who thought "young" Rawson's treatment of his father's clerk generous in the extreme. Howell had been in the office over twenty years, he had been fully qualified as a solicitor for half of them, but old Mr. Rawson never hinted at making him a partner; he paid him a liberal salary as managing clerk (a very liberal one as clerkships go now), but a clerk Maurice Howell would have remained to the end of his days but for the change of head in the office.

Fred Rawson had known Howell before he left England. The staid, soberly-conducted clerk of thirty-five had not much in common with the ricketty young man ten years his junior, but he had toadied his employer's son (as was his nature) and helped to keep some of Master Fred's neglect of business from his father; and now he reaped his reward, for he was a junior partner in the firm with an undertaking in the deed of partnership that his share was to be not less than six hundred a-year. He had unlimited power at the office, and last, but not least, some six months after Fred Rawson returned from his long exile, he proposed to Margaret Howell, his partner's only child.

The Howells were not gentlefolks, but quiet, plodding people, very respectable, and with an intense desire to rise in life and "make a lady" of their pretty Meg. Gentility was Mrs. Howell's fetish, and her daughter, who sadly lacked the bump of reverence, said once her mother would have bored a hole in her nose and worn a ring through it, savage fashion, had she been persuaded it was a genteel thing to do!

Mrs. Howell did not particularly like her prospective son-in-law. She never could forget the days when she had called his parents "Sir" and "ma'am," and thought it rather an honour to take tea with the housekeeper in Bedford square.

She was never at her ease with Fred Rawson; but she was intensely proud of the grand match her daughter was making, and never wearied of telling Meg she was the luckiest girl in the world.

"Eighteen hundred a year, my dear, if he's a penny; and he'll settle half his property on you. Then old Mr. Rawson had the finest plate you ever saw. They couldn't have grander in one of the big silver shops in the city, and Mr. Fred's a fine young man."

"He's not particularly young," said Meg, drily. She was by no means so elated at her prospects as her mother was for her.

"He's only just turned forty, and you're twenty-two," said Mrs. Howell, "eighteen years is nothing at all; and such a generous lover, too, why I'm sure the presents he sends you are fit for a Countess."

"He might keep them all for what I care," said Meg, discontentedly. "I always feel as if they were bought with Mr. Milton's money. To my mind he'd be a deal more right to things than Frederic Rawson."

"You're a foolish child," said Mrs. Howell, "what's young Milton to you? I don't suppose you ever spoke to him in your life."

"Yes, I did twice. He's nothing to me, mother; but I'll tell you this. Eric Milton's a gentleman, and that's what his cousin never will be, in spite of his money."

It was not particularly propitious that this conversation should take place on the very night Maurice Howell had resolved to "speak seriously" to his wilful daughter.

The junior partner lived in a newish-looking house at East Dulwich, and returned to the bosom of his family by tramway in time for that meal so dear to the hearts of suburban Londoners, a "tea-dinner."

Mrs. Howell's tastes were not extravagant. She had not launched out into a second servant on the strength of her husband's promotion, and still "gave an eye" to the cooking. She was in the kitchen putting a last touch to a savory stew when her husband's latch-key was heard in the door.

Meg was alone in the front parlour, and Maurice Howell seized on the opportunity of speaking to her.

"Look here, child!" he said, sharply, "Mr. Rawson's getting tired of your shilly-shallying, and he's coming down to-morrow night to ask you to fix the day."

"Is he?" inquired Meg, indifferently. "I shan't be at home to-morrow. I'm going out to tea."

"You must be at home," returned her father. "I mean to stand none of your nonsense. I've worked early and late to make a lady of you, and now I've got you a rich husband, I'll not have him trifled with."

"Mr. Rawson does not care two straws for me," said Meg. "I can't understand why he wants to marry me—that is if he does want to."

"He wants to marry you right enough," said her father, "and you can settle things to-morrow."

"Then I must go round to Linda to-night," said Meg, apparently yielding, "and tell her she mustn't expect me. Mother," as Mrs. Howell and the stew came in together, both looking very hot, "I'm going round to Linda West's to tell her I can't come to tea to-morrow."

"But your supper, child," said her fond parent.

"I'm not hungry. I've a bit of a headache, and I think the air will take it off."

Linda West lived "round the corner." She and Meg had been schoolfellows, and were still friends; but it was not only Linda whom Miss Howell was anxious to see. Miss West possessed a brother, who was Fred Rawson's humble rival and Meg's favoured lover.

This fact had not lessened her friendship for Linda, as the latter was very shortly to be married herself, and so had the least reason for wishing Algernon to remain single.

The Wests were poorer than the Howells (even before the partnership) but they were also on a slightly higher social plane. Algy was a bank clerk, a very pleasant, gentlemanly young fellow,

while Linda was engaged to a curate, which threw a double halo of sanctity and gentility over the little house in the Marden-road.

Linda was two years older than Meg—not so pretty and rather more staid in manner; but a very nice girl for all that.

She opened the door herself, and drew her friend into the pretty little sitting-room, which though its furniture had not cost a quarter so much as that in the Howells' "parlour," yet looked so infinitely more tasteful and homelike.

"I was just wishing you would look in, Meg, but as you were coming to-morrow, I hardly liked to send and ask you, lest Mrs. Howell should be vexed."

"I'm in awful trouble, Linda," cried Meg, clinging to the elder girl, "in pecks of trouble, dear; Mr. Rawson's coming to-morrow, and father says he means to fix the day."

She was crying now, and Linda, who had a wonderful motherly instinct for one so young, kissed and soothed her very tenderly.

"Don't fret, Meg, no one can force you to marry Mr. Rawson against your will; but why in the world did you accept him?"

"I thought perhaps he would dismiss father if I refused him, and I meant to be so disagreeable that he would be glad to break it off. And then, you know, I was vexed with Algy because he did not speak out."

Miss West stroked the curly head caressingly. "You know perfectly Algy worships you, but was it a suitable moment to 'speak out,' when your father had just become ever so much richer, and had found a wealthy son-in-law?"

"I suppose not; but—"

"Hasn't the plan answered, Meg? have you tried being 'disagreeable' to Mr. Rawson?"

"I've only seen him half-a-dozen times since we were engaged, and he laughs at my bad temper as if it were a good joke."

"And you don't like him any better?"

"I think I hate him," said Meg, with a kind of choked sob; "and, Linda, I'm certain he's a bad man. I can't explain it to you, but his eyes positively frighten me, and I couldn't marry him if I had never seen Algy, and if Frederic Rawson were as rich as Croesus."

"Then why don't you tell him so?"

"I'm afraid to; you can't think what his eyes are like, Linda, they seem to burn one's face."

Linda changed the subject.

"Don't you want to know why I wished so much to see you to-day?"

"I believe I forgot all about it; I am so bothered."

"Well, my news won't solve your problem, I fear, but to me it is very wonderful good fortune. Clem has really got that post, after all. He isn't a curate any longer, but the warden of St. Boniface College, Maryland, and we've got to be married at once, and sail in a month."

"Good gracious! It's seven hundred a-year and a house. And you'll want a touseau and an outfit, and only a month to do it all in. Linda, how can you keep so quiet?"

"We've been engaged four years," replied Miss West, "and I felt Clem would be sure to get something good some day. I don't feel a bit afraid to go to the other end of the world with him, Meg, only I don't like leaving Algy."

Miss Howell looked up with a suspicious blush. "I think, do you know, Linda, that it's just possible I might console Algy."

"What! If Mr. Rawson is coming to-morrow to ask you to 'name the day'?"

Meg looked at her friend with a strangely earnest face; she had accepted Fred Rawson half out of pique at Algy's reserve, half from parental persecutions; she had regretted that acceptance ever since.

"Don't you think, Linda, you might speak to Algy?"

"About you?" queried Linda, in a perplexed tone.

"You might tell Algy I hated Mr. Rawson, and that I would break with him at once if I were quite sure anyone else wanted me."

Linda West smiled.

"Well, I'll do my best, Meg; you'd better go upstairs to my little painting room, for I hear

someone coming up the steps. I shall get on better with my commission if I don't think you are listening to me and reproaching me if I fail. Only, Meg," and her voice grew almost solemn, "are you quite sure of yourself? Marriage on a hundred and fifty pounds a-year means a good deal of careful managing."

"I never was extravagant," returned Meg. "Why, I'd marry Algy if he'd only two pounds a week."

The "painting room" was not a studio, for Linda West was not an artist; it was a tiny slip where such articles of furniture as looked shabby were enamelled or decorated afresh, and where the curate's betrothed retired to work at any particularly "messy" job she had on hand. There was only one chair, and nothing conducive to amusement, but Meg understood it was better for her to be out of earshot while Linda told Algy of her troubles, and the sitting rooms in Marden-road, having folding-doors, anything spoken in one was distinctly audible in the other.

It seemed a long time to Meg, for Linda first told her brother of her own prospects, he having left for the Bank before her lover came to announce them.

"It's rattling good fortune for you and Clem," said Algy, with a groan; "but what on earth shall I do here by myself?"

"Marry, and bring your wife here," was the quiet reply; "the Warden's house is furnished throughout, so I shan't want my share of our Lores and Penates, and I think Mrs. Algy will find her home a very pretty one."

"But—there's Rawson. You say Meg won't marry him, but they are certainly engaged. I can't go and ask her to jilt him for me."

"If you were rich and he was poor it would be a risky proceeding," observed Linda, "as in that case you might always torment yourself with the fancy your money bought your wife; but as you are far away the poorer of her two suitors, I think you might venture."

And Algy took his sister's advice, with the result that Linda's little painting room became for one brief hour a scene of bliss. And this was what they settled. Algy should purchase a marriage license the next day, and the following Saturday he and Meg would be quietly married at their mutual parish church. Monday being the first of August was a Bank Holiday, and, getting leave on Saturday, as a favour, Mr. West would thus be able to spend a very short honeymoon at Brighton, returning by a very early train on Tuesday, and going to business, while his bride betook herself to her new home in Marden-road.

"You and Linda won't mind sharing domestic authority for such a short time," said Algy, smiling. "You know she is to be married on the 22nd of August, and sails the same day for her distant home."

"I can help her buy her touseau," said Meg, practically. "By the bye, Algy, I hope you won't mind my not having one."

"Your not having what?" asked Algy.

"A touseau! Father and mother are sure to be so awfully put out about Mr. Rawson they will very likely never forgive me."

"I shouldn't mind Meg, if you came to me without any dress except the one you wore so long as I had you. But, dear, when do you mean to tell Mr. Rawson of your change of purpose?"

"Not at all."

"Meg!"

"When he comes to-morrow night, I shall let him fix any day he pleases in August. As I am going to marry you on the 30th of July, I shall have ample excuse for not keeping my appointment with him."

"And your parents?"

"I will write to mother from Brighton. You see, Algy, Mr. Rawson can't do father any harm now, for the deed of partnership has really been signed for months."

"I can't make out," here Algy stopped abruptly, recollecting his intended speech was hardly flattering to his *fiancée*.

"You can't make out why Mr. Rawson wished to marry me," said Meg, guessing his thoughts and speaking aloud, for she was far too candid

herself to be offended at it. "Well, do you know, Algy, it has puzzled me awfully."

"You see," said West, half apologetically, "it would be easy enough to understand his wishes if he had seen more of you, but as I understand it, he proposed at your third meeting, and he hardly ever comes near East Dulwich."

"Once a month! It's not very often it is for a man whose time is entirely at his own disposal. But then you see, Algy, of one thing I am certain, Frederic Rawson does not love me."

"But then, why did he propose?"

The girl's face grew unusually grave.

"I can trust you, Algy, you may ridicule my fancy as impossible, but you will keep it a secret from all the world!"

"From everyone—what is it, Meg?"

"I think," the girl paused more to arrange her words than from any doubt of her own opinion, "I think, Algy, old Mr. Rawson must have made a will after all, leaving everything to his nephew, Eric Milton, and that my father promised Frederic Rawson to keep the secret on condition he married me."

A dead silence, only Algy pressed the girl's hand tenderly, as though to assure her he sympathized with the pain it must have cost her to put her doubt into words.

"I have thought of it," she went on at last, "till I am almost crazy, and I feel sure I am right. My father was with old Mr. Rawson when he died. Mr. Milton was away on his holiday, before he got back all was over, and Frederic Rawson had returned."

"You think," said Algy, gently, "your father knew of young Rawson's whereabouts all along, and as soon as the breath was out of his father's body, sent him word?"

"Yes," breathed Meg faintly, "and I think the bargain was struck between them there and then. A junior partnership for father, a rich husband for me, was to be the price of keeping back one simple paper."

"It would be fraud," said Algy, gravely. "Meg, I can't believe it of your father."

"It would be fraud in the eyes of the law," she assented, "but my father never liked young Milton. He always said he had stolen Mr. Fred's place in his father's heart, and to many people the son would seem to have a better right than the nephew."

"When did you think of all this, Meg? Not at first."

"No; it all came to me gradually. As step by step father got on, first a higher salary, then the partnership, I seemed to feel it was because of—what I have told you. Then, since Frederic Rawson came to our house, I can't help seeing that father does not treat him respectfully, but more as though he were—in his power."

"It's hard enough on the other man, poor fellow," said Algy, then West feelingly.

"Yes, and he is such a nice man; a gentleman to his very boots, Algy, and he was engaged to a beautiful girl. They were to have been married last Easter, but father told us the other day it was all off now, for Miss Seymour couldn't bring herself to be poor."

"Then Eric Milton is poor now?"

"So poor that he actually sold the best of his things when he left Bedford Square. He's living in some boarding-house out Bloomsbury way. Father said he saw him the other day, and he looked ten years older."

"And your father dislikes him—have you any idea why?"

"I think when Mr. Fred disappeared father hoped old Mr. Rawson would take him into partnership. He qualified for a solicitor on purpose, but the old gentleman never seemed even to think of it. He adopted his nephew, Eric, who had been left an orphan just then, and never so much as raised father's salary. I was only a child at the time, but I know how put out he was. And years later when Mr. Eric first came into the office, father seemed quite to hate him. 'That young puppy,' he generally called him."

"Well," said Algy, as he pressed a parting kiss on the girl's blushing face, "at least, I feel no compunction about robbing Frederic Rawson. To him you were just part of a business agreement,

Meg. While to me you are the one woman in the world."

CHAPTER IV.

"To Parish Clerks and Others.—Wanted the certificate of the marriage of Clive Adair and Helen—supposed to have taken place in the summer or early autumn of 1870. Ten pounds reward will be paid for the said certificate by Eric Milton, lawyer, of Trafalgar Buildings, Chancery Lane."

When Barbara Hawthorne read this advertisement she felt as if she had really made some progress in the quest undertaken to fulfil her last promise to her mother. To the young colonist it seemed such an easy thing for every parish clerk forthwith to take up the register of marriages at his own particular church, and see if he were able to claim the reward; but Eric Milton was by no means so sanguine, and when the advertisement had appeared every day for a week and brought not a single reply he was disappointed, but not surprised.

The great difficulty in the case—as he had not told Mrs. Hawthorne—was that at every step it required money. Advertisements must be paid for on the spot; detectives and enquiry offices also require money down. While young Milton was so painfully straitened in circumstances that to advance more than a very few pounds for any one client's business was to him a serious matter.

In some respects he thought a lawyer with ample pecuniary resources would have done Mrs. Hawthorne's case more justice; on the other hand, a wealthy, long-established solicitor would not have been able to bestow the personal interest and unlimited trouble which Eric was ready to devote to the quest.

Fortunately Barbara Hawthorne was singularly sharp-sighted. Before the advertisement had appeared often she perceived that it must cost something, and that Mr. Milton, being a 'struggling' lawyer, probably had not much capital. She made another journey to Trafalgar Buildings—this time with a bank-note for fifty pounds.

"You know I told you I had only a hundred pounds to spend," she said, simply. "I want you to have half the money now, because there will be so many things to pay for—the advertisements and the reward—and, oh, lots of things!"

Eric gave her a formal receipt for the money, observing—

"I only wish, Mrs. Hawthorne, I felt sure of having to pay that reward."

"Then you have had no answer?"

"Not one."

"We shall have to fall back on the other track, and try to find James Walters."

"That reminds me. I saw the detective again this morning, and he wants to know if you could not furnish him with a photograph of Walters."

"Women don't keep photos of their cruellest foes," said the girl, simply; "and the worst of it is, he was such an ordinary face; a description of him would apply to dozens of people; but I used to be able to draw, and I will see what I can do with my pencil this afternoon; a sketch would be better than nothing."

"Better even than a photograph," agreed Eric, "because, if done from memory, you would be sure to emphasize any trifling peculiarity."

"He had red hair, and eyes just like a flash," said Barbara, thoughtfully; "and yet those eyes could pierce one through and through. I'll do my best, Mr. Milton, and give you the sketch to-night in the drawing-room."

For of late the young lawyer had taken to frequent Mrs. Mason's drawing-room after dinner instead of spending the evening hours in the apartment sacred to the fumes of tobacco. Barbara Hawthorne had become a very great favourite at Polgarth House. Mrs. Mason knew that she had come to England about some intricate family business, the settlement of which would decide whether she lived for the future in England or Australia; but the particulars of Barbara's quest were known only to Eric Milton. He had judged it best to take no one into their confidence, and the circle at Polgarth House were

not inquisitive. Mrs. Hawthorne was a very pleasant inmate, and they hoped she would stay some time; but they did not trouble themselves particularly about her affairs, and never tried to find out more than she told them.

She had been at Mrs. Mason's three weeks, and August was more than half through when she paid that second visit to Trafalgar Chambers. Several of Mrs. Mason's inmates were away for a "holiday," and besides, as the only lady staying at Polgarth House, Barbara always had the drawing-room to herself in the afternoon; so she was not afraid of interruptions when she settled herself at one of the large, old-fashioned windows with a drawing pencil and a piece of cartridge paper.

It is an open question which a woman remembers best, a loved or hated face; but it is far easier to sketch the last; in trying to reproduce the features of one dear to us, there is always the fear of not doing them justice, always (if death or absence has separated us from them) the painful sense of loss to weaken our skill.

Barbara Hawthorne had had very little instruction in drawing, but she was a born artist, and though the face she presently produced on the paper was strikingly life-like, it did not satisfy her—to her eyes it was "not half bad enough;" but any man who had ever seen James Walters could have recognised it at once, while the merest stranger would have guessed that the sketch was the likeness of someone existing in flesh and blood, not a fancy head.

Dinner was not a long function, for the people at Polgarth House were busy, and the fare, though ample, not elaborate. Long before eight o'clock Mrs. Hawthorne was back in the drawing room, and Mr. Milton soon followed her.

"Everyone has gone out to-night," he said, cheerfully, "except the Professor, who is smoking a cigar now, but has challenged Mrs. Mason to a game of cribbage at nine."

Barbara glanced at the clock.

"He won't be here for an hour yet. Mr. Milton, here is the sketch; it doesn't satisfy me, it is not nearly so horrible as the original, but it will give you more idea what James Walters is like than any description of mine."

Eric took the paper and carried it over to the centre table, on which stood a large Duplex lamp. He was so long in speaking that Mrs. Hawthorne grew alarmed.

"Won't it be of any help?" she asked; "do you think it will be no use?"

He crossed the room to her side, and she saw that he was pale as death, the veins on his forehead stood out like purple cords; he still kept the sketch in his hand as he said gravely—

"You told me this morning Walters was an ordinary face, you said a description of him would apply to dozens of men."

"So a mere description would," she answered, "but really his face is uncommon because there is something so repulsive about it. Can't you see what I mean, a kind of look like a savage bull dog?"

"Aye—you have put it into the sketch—I shouldn't think two men could have that awful expression either."

"I am sure they couldn't, but you seem upset; I told you Walters was horrible, and this sketch isn't really bad enough."

"Mrs. Hawthorne," said the lawyer gravely, "have you ever heard my history? Our friend Mrs. Mason is fond of talking, has she ever told you of the terrible change that came to my fortunes just over a year ago?"

"Yes," said Barbara, "and I think your cousin treated you shamefully."

"He had the law on his side—but what I have to tell you is passing strange; this sketch is a faithful likeness of my cousin, Frederick Rawson; is it possible that 'Walters' was an assumed name, and your enemy is really my kinsman?"

Barbara shook her head.

"He had been known as Walters ever since I remember him, and longer too, for you know he signed that name when he witnessed my mother's second marriage."

"True, I had forgotten that, but it is a strange coincidence that my cousin arrived in England

(or shall I say was seen in England) after an absence of several years just twelvemonths ago, or about eight weeks after James Walters left Sydney.

Barbara Hawthorne looked at him almost like a wounded child.

"You are keeping something back, Mr. Milton," she said reproachfully; "what is it?"

"I was only wondering," he hesitated, "whether my cousin could not possibly be James Walters; he might have dropped his own name on going to the Antipodes."

"But was your cousin in Australia, and when did he go out?"

"In seventy five; I know he went to Sydney in the first instance; nothing was heard of him since till his father's death. My uncle never gave up the hope of his return; I have felt thankful often since that he did not live to see it; the Fred he remembered so fondly was wild and extravagant, but not cruel and wicked like this Fred is now."

Barbara Hawthorne did an extraordinary thing; she clasped her hands together like a child who has made some joyful discovery, and exclaimed,—

"I have it now. I see it all."

"But I don't," said Eric, rather bewildered, "but for Walters having been one of the witnesses to your mother's second marriage in seventy-three, and my cousin not having left England till two years later, I should have declared they must be one and the same. The likeness is so wonderful."

"They are one and the same," said Barbara, "and James Walters has robbed you as well as me."

"But—"

"You must let me tell you my idea in my own way. It doesn't sound possible, but I am sure I am right. I don't believe the man you call your cousin is Frederic Rawson at all. I think he is my enemy, James Walters, and that he has personated your cousin for the sake of what he would gain by it."

But Eric looked so utterly bewildered she had to put it differently.

"Walters was always going about the colony. I should say he knew people in every part of it. He may have met your cousin and wormed himself into his confidence, he may even have been with him when he died, and have agreed—for a consideration to tell his father of his end. Oh, Mr. Milton, how slow you are. Why, won't you you see what I mean? Arrived in England, and finding Mr. Rawson dead, no will, and the dead Fred heir to everything, what would be easier to such a thorough villain as Walters, than to pass himself off as the exiled son?"

Eric looked at her spell bound.

"I don't believe you are right," he said at last. "Don't you see the difference it would make to me. It would give me back all I looked on as my certain inheritance; from a struggling needy man I should have comparative wealth."

"I am sure I am right," said Barbara with conviction. "Courage, Mr. Milton, Walters has wronged us both, but we will both have a reckoning with him. He shall give me my mother's papers, and restore you your uncle's property. If we are prompt it will yet be in time for your happiness. Forgive me, I ought not to speak of it, but Mrs. Mason told me you had lost love as well as wealth to your cousin. When Miss Seymour hears you have recovered your property, she—"

"She was married last week to a cotton lord," said Eric, bitterly. "She had been engaged to him for weeks before she finally broke with me. Don't look at me like that Mrs. Hawthorne. Don't pity me, impostor or not, my pretended cousin has done me one good turn, he has saved me from a wife who valued my honest love as nothing compared to gold."

"I am so sorry."

"You need not be. When I had her letter my eyes were opened. When I found she had married a man thirty years her senior, whom she used to make game of, my disillusionment was complete."

Barbara changed the subject abruptly.

"I suppose this man gave some proofs of his

identity. He didn't just hang up his hat and say, 'I am Frederic Rawson!'"

"He had plenty of proofs. Letters written by my uncle to his son before their rupture. A portrait of my dead aunt, and other personal belongings of my cousin's; but, of course, the most convincing proof of all was that my uncle's managing clerk, who had been in the office during the five years Fred served his articles there recognized him at once."

"That's bad—who is the clerk?"

"A man called Maurice Howell. Not a gentleman, but a plodding, conscientious lawyer. I would have trusted Howell with untold gold, but I never liked him. The sentiment was mutual, for he could not bear me."

"Oh," and Barbara looked relieved. "Have you seen him lately?"

"No."

"Heard of him?"

"Oh he's in clover. Fred has taken him into partnership and intends to marry his daughter."

"Do you know her?"

"I have seen her once or twice—a very pleasant sort of young woman, far too good to be married to a man old enough to be her father."

"Heaven help her if she marries James Walters," said Mrs. Hawthorne; "but don't you see what all this proves?"

"No, I don't."

"Why, your pretended kinsman is an impostor, and the man Howell knows it. He has 'identified' Walters as Fred Rawson, on consideration of the partnership, and a rich husband for his daughter."

"Mrs. Hawthorne," said Eric, with a burst of admiration, "it's a thousand pities you are a woman, you would have made such a splendid lawyer."

"Well, what do you suggest as our next step? I suppose we can't confront Mr. Rawson, alias Walters, till we have a few more proofs."

"I'm afraid not."

"Aren't there any old servants or close friends of your uncle who knew the real Fred?"

"If there are, Maurice Howell has silenced them. I think the best thing would be for you to try and get a surreptitious glimpse of (the supposed) Fred Rawson. Until you have actually seen him and are prepared to swear he is James Walters we hardly know where we stand."

CHAPTER V.

THERE were to be nothing but surprises for Eric Milton. The very next morning he received a call from a tall aristocratic looking old man who refused to give his name, and came into the office looking so proud and contemptuous that the young lawyer did not feel much attracted to his new client.

But the stranger was not a client, as Eric soon discovered, for he had no sooner seated himself than he began, irritably,—

"I've come from Cornwall, sir, to remonstrate with you on your rudeness. My lawyer wanted me to write or to let him manage the affair; but I preferred to see to it myself. I consider you have behaved abominably."

Eric decided that his visitor was labouring under some extraordinary mistake.

"I do not understand," he said, courteously; and the quiet dignity of his manner impressed the irascible old gentleman. "You refused to give your name; but we are strangers, and I am quite innocent of any rudeness to you."

"Look at that," said the old gentleman, putting a slip of paper on the table; it was, in fact, a cutting from the *Times* with a copy of the advertisement Eric had inserted for Barbara Hawthorne. "Perhaps you will deny next that you are the Mr. Milton described here?"

"I deny nothing, sir," said Eric, gravely; "but I presume you have not come here to claim the reward?"

A scowl punished this speech.

"I have come here to remonstrate with you for trying to rake up a most painful family scandal," said the old man. "What is it to you whom Clive Adair married? The poor creature

who was weak enough to give up home and friends for his sake did not live to repent her rashness, within a year of her unfortunate marriage she died."

"She died three months ago," replied Eric, very gravely, "leaving her only child a dying command to come to England, and, if possible, trace out her grandfather."

"I don't believe it!"

"I have no interest in deceiving you, sir. Mrs. Adair's daughter landed in England at the end of July. Her one desire is to find her mother's family—not to beg of them, she is far too proud for anything of the sort; but that—as she puts it, she may feel she has someone belonging to her of whom she need not be ashamed."

The old gentleman looked at Eric as though he would read him through and through.

"And you believed this young person?"

"I believed every word the young lady spoke. The fact that she has travelled thousands of miles to fulfil her promise to her dying mother, that she is ready to spend the whole of her tiny fortune in the quest, is proof enough for me."

"Ah! you look as if you could keep a secret, Mr. Milton; just put this young lady out of your head for a moment and listen to me. My daughter, my favourite child, maid you, left my home to marry Mr. Adair. He was a gentleman, I admit, but he had nothing in the world but what he earned; he was in an Australian bank, and was home on leave when he unluckily met my girl."

"And she accompanied him on his return to Sydney?"

"Just so, and I fretted after her like the old fool I was, and when she had been gone two years I had a bad illness, and somehow I felt I could not die with my favourite girl unforgiven. I made my youngest daughter write out to Sydney (we had the name of the bank), and tell Neil she and her husband were to come home. Her portion of twenty thousand pounds settled on her, would bring in more than Adair's post, and I knew I'd influence enough to get him a snug berth somewhere."

"And that letter was sent?"

"Of course it was—I saw it myself—the reply came, not from Adair, he'd not the decency to write himself—but from the bank manager, saying Mrs. Adair died within a year of her arrival in the colony. Now my poor child has been in her grave over twenty years, and I call it abominable rudeness for you to keep advertising for the certificate of her marriage. I can tell you the ceremony was legal enough and what is it to anyone now?"

"Sir," said Eric gravely, "you have been deceived; Clive Adair died within a year of his return to the colony, his widow and child struggled on in abject poverty; two years later she was persuaded, for her little girl's sake to marry again; her second husband turned out a scoundrel, and, poor soul, her one object in life seems to have been to keep from him that she had rich relations in England. When he was dead she told her daughter her sad story, but death claimed her before she could give her your name and abode; she believed the left papers filling up all she had left unsaid, but these papers were stolen by a villain who enjoyed the confidence of Mrs. Adair's second husband."

"But that letter, the letter Lucy wrote to her sister—I saw it with my own eyes."

"Did you see it posted?"

The old man winced.

"What do you mean?"

"Your younger daughter may have been jealous of her sister; if about to marry herself, she may have thought she would be more liberally portioned if you believed your favourite child dead."

"You mean she never sent the letter I saw?"

"Yes; she probably sent instead a formal note to the bank manager asking for Clive Adair's address; he replied by telling of his clerk's death; an 'a' skillfully added would make the letter announce Mrs. Adair's death instead of her husband's."

"Ah!"—the old man seemed half convinced—"I'll be even with Lucy. Fancy my Helen in poverty all these years that I have been longing

for her. Now, Mr. Milton, where is the young woman?"

"Mrs. Hawthorne?"

"No, Miss Adair—my grandchild you say."

"But she is Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Then I'll have nothing to do with her. You say Helen was poor, so of course the girl has married some dreadful cad."

"I don't think Mr. Hawthorne was a cad, but he has been dead for two years."

"A widow, eh? why she can't be twenty-one."

"Just turned twenty-one."

"And decent looking?"

"Yes."

"Oh, hang it all I hate money-grubbers, you must know what I mean; is she presentable? does she murder the English language every time she speaks? in a word, is she a vulgar little upstart, or a girl who, with a little training, I need not be ashamed of?"

"Mrs. Hawthorne is the loveliest woman I ever saw!" broke out Eric impulsively.

"I didn't ask if she was plain," muttered the old man.

"And she is as graceful and refined as she is beautiful," went on the young lawyer. "The first day she came here I thought she looked like some wandering princess."

"Oh, you did, did you? And, pray, did she give you any proof of her story?"

"Yes, the certificate of her baptism and of her mother's second marriage. I hope I am on the track of the villain who stole the papers, when, of course, the proofs would be more conclusive."

"They'll have to be conclusive, if I acknowledge her, sir," returned the old gentleman: "for my property is strictly entailed and must go to my legal heir. Both my sons are dead, and though my daughter Lucy has half-a-dozen children, if your client is the daughter of Helen and Clive Adair, she must be my heiress, even if she were half a savage."

"Will you go and see her?" asked Eric, gravely.

"I don't mind if I do. Remember, I admit nothing; for everybody's sake I must have the clearest proof; but you've convinced me of two things, sir—you're an honest man, and you really believe every word you have told me about your strange client."

Barbara Hawthorne, sitting alone in the drawing-room, writing a long letter to the eldest Miss Parker, was a little surprised when the boy, Herbert, brought her a card inscribed,

"The Earl of Lorraine."

The page was considerably impressed himself, noblemen not being frequent visitors to Polgarth House; but he ushered in the august caller with great ceremony, and, closing the door, left the two alone.

It was the Earl who spoke first.

"Great Heavens! Can the grave give up its dead? Has my Nell come back to me?"

Then Barbara took courage, she went up to him with outstretched hand.

"Mother always said I was just like her. She said her father would think she had come back to him as she was when she went away."

A kiss on her fair white brow seemed to say she was right.

"My dear," said the Earl, huskily, "I am quite content. From this moment you belong to me; but for the world and the family, your aunt and cousins, you know, there'll have to be legal business and all sorts of proofs. I'll stay in London and come and see you every day, but I am afraid I can't take you home to Combe Lorraine till things are settled. Your aunt Lucy is the nominal mistress of my house, and—she might be unpleasant."

"I am not Nell," corrected the girl; "I am Barbara."

"After your grandmother?"

"Yes; and, grandfather, I don't want you to take me to live with you; I am quite ready to earn my own living, only mother had set her heart on my coming to England, and I did so want to belong to somebody."

"You'll have to live with me as soon as the lawyers settle things. You'll be my heiress."

"But my uncles?"

"Dead, both of them, and not a child of

either. Lucy has a good-sized family, but she was my younger daughter, so your mother's child comes before the boys; it will be a bitter pill for her, but you shall have your rights, my Barbara, if there is law and justice in England. I like that young lawyer of yours, where did you pick him up?"

"He was here, and Mrs. Mason recommended me to consult him when I told her I wanted a lawyer."

"He's got a head on his shoulders," admitted Lord Lorraine, grudgingly, "and he's a gentleman."

"He's the truest gentleman I ever met," said Barbara. "If I had been a peeress instead of a poor colonial girl, he couldn't have given more time and trouble to my case."

"He'll be no loser in the long run," said her grandfather, "I shall see to that; and now that we have made acquaintance, Barbara, I'll go back to Mr. Milton and discuss with him what steps we had better take. I'm an old man, you see, and if anything happened to me before you were proved to be my grandchild, affairs would be at a terrible dead lock."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. AND MRS. HOWELL were more than surprised—they were simply astounded—when the letter Margaret posted at London Bridge station before starting for Brighton reached them.

Married under their very eyes, so to say—for the church where the ceremony took place could be seen from their upper windows—married to a bank clerk with a hundred and fifty pounds a year, when she was engaged to a man with nearly two thousand—well, it was preposterous, abominable!

Mrs. Howell on the whole took rather a milder view of Margaret's transgression than the husband. She was just as ambitious, just as fond of money; she had schemed and plotted quite as eagerly for the girl's advancement in life; but she had not sinned for it; so she could afford to forgive Margaret more easily than could her father, who, besides his disappointment and vexation, had to feel he had committed a crime the law calls by the ugly name of perjury, to no purpose.

Fred Rawson took his desertion very coolly. "I was too old for your girl, and she disliked me from the first," he said, frankly. "I was quite willing to fulfil my part of our contract by marrying her; but she wouldn't have been happy with me. Meg was made for a quiet domestic life; she was not fit to mate with a hawk like me."

He positively refused a cool request from Howell for a large sum of money, saying he considered the partnership an ample reward for past services.

"I shan't interfere with you. I don't like law, and you'll have the whole control of the business in your hands. I shan't ask awkward questions about your pickings; but that must content you."

There arose a great debate between the Howells whether they should "forgive" Margaret. Mrs. Algernon West had come to live at the little house in Mardon-road, and looked the picture of happiness. Her parents' hearts yearned towards her, but pride stood in the way of reconciliation; they decided Meg must not be pardoned too easily. Linda had married her Clement and embarked for her distant home before the Howells had decided to take Meg back again to favour; and then a very strange thing happened, which speedily solved all their doubts. One September evening, after Maurice Howell had returned from the office, a carriage stopped at his door; a lady and gentleman alighted from it, and the awestruck little maid-of-all-work told her master that Lord Lorraine wished to see him on important business.

"Gracious!" ejaculated Mrs. Howell. "A real live nobleman coming here at last! Why, who'd have thought it?"

The Earl went to the point at once. This visit was the outcome of a long and anxious consultation between himself and Eric Milton.

Both were agreed that, without the papers stolen by James Walters, it would be a task of untold difficulty to prove Barbara's claim to be the Earl's heiress. Barbara had obtained a glimpse of Fred Rawson, and was ready to swear to his identity with the James Walters she had known in Sydney; but it seemed, both to the young lawyer and the old nobleman, their case would be far stronger if they could bring Maurice Howell over to their side. If, when they accused the so-called Frederic Rawson of fraud and theft, his partner joined in condemning him; if the one person who had identified the colonist as old Mr. Rawson's exiled son confessed he had been mistaken, the game was in their own hands.

"I daresay you are surprised at my calling so late," said Lord Lorraine; "but my business is entirely of a private nature, and could not be conducted at your office. I have come to warn you, Mr. Howell, that you are the victim of a very clever conspiracy, and have been deceived by as artful a villain as ever wore shoe-leather. The man who pretends to be Frederic Rawson is an Australian blackleg, and badly wanted now in Sydney on a charge of forgery and fraud. Knowing the many years you were with the late Mr. Rawson, I thought it only fair to warn you of the character of the man you have received as his son."

Maurice Howell felt certain that, as he put it, all was up; but he made a brave front, not having the least desire to share his confederate's punishment.

"Mr. Rawson brought proofs which would have convinced anyone," he protested; "as to resemblance, there's not much between a youngster of twenty-four and a man of middle age; he's the same height as Fred Rawson, he's got the very same manner of speech."

Lord Lorraine looked for the first time at Barbara.

"My grandchild is prepared to identify your partner as James Walters, a man who forged her late husband's name for ten thousand pounds, and who left Sydney on the *Southern Queen* in the April of last year; the captain and some of the passengers can be produced to swear that 'Frederic Rawson' is the man they knew as James Walters. Altogether, the case against him is pretty black, it will probably mean penal servitude. Of course, as a lawyer you know that if you persist in supporting this impostor, you are liable to be arrested as his confederate."

Maurice Howell wiped the perspiration from his face; this was plain speaking with a vengeance.

"I believed in him," he said eagerly, "I thoroughly believed in him; why I allowed him to be engaged to my only child."

"Heaven help her," said Mrs. Hawthorne, feelingly, "for a crueler fiend never existed in human form."

"Meg didn't fancy him," confessed Mr. Howell, "she ran off and married someone else; very undutiful conduct, but if you are right in your suspicions, my lord, I may be glad she did so."

"I am quite right," said Lord Lorraine, gravely; "until the last few days I confess I was puzzled to know how Walters obtained the information to enable him to get up such a fraud; but unless I am greatly mistaken my grandchild's husband, the man he so cruelly wronged, was the real Fred Rawson, and in stealing the papers relating to his property Walters also possessed himself of such others as would prove the identity of their possessor with Fred Rawson."

Every vestige of colour had forsaken Howell's face, he felt the game was up indeed.

"Mr. Fred went to the colony in '75," he answered awkwardly; "he'd be a good bit older than that young lady."

"He was forty when he died two years ago," interposed Barbara. "I only knew him as Frederic Hawthorne. I knew his father was an English lawyer, and that he left his native land under a cloud."

"Frederick Hawthorne Rawson," said the lawyer, "that was his full name; we did hear he got in clover a bit in Sydney and made a tidy fortune; but he was penniless when he came back to England last year."

"Barbara," said Lord Lorraine quietly, "you had better leave us; if you will go back to the carriage I can finish my conversation with Mr. Howell in a few minutes."

When she was gone his manner changed, it grew very peremptory.

"You allowed Walters to steal the dead Rawson's name and position because you wanted to make money and owed Eric Milton a grudge. Now I give you your choice, stand side by side with your accomplice in a felon's dock where he will assuredly find himself, or turn Queen's evidence; you need not incriminate yourself, it can be supposed you honestly believed in his identity with your employer's son."

Howell looked hopelessly at the Earl.

"It will mean ruin; Mr. Milton will never keep me on at the office."

"Well, my man, penal servitude will be rather worse than losing your situation, won't it? Come, I can't wait; you must make your choice now, which are you on—our side or Walters'?"

"On yours."

"Good! Then you will hold your tongue concerning this visit. I shall call formally at the office to-morrow with a warrant for the apprehension of Rawson, alias James Walters, and you may please remember that if you attempt to defend him, you will be arrested as his confederate. What is his private address?"

"Caroline-street, Pimlico—lodgings."

"And where does he keep his papers, private ones, relating to his past?"

"Nowhere. If he has such things he carries them on his person. I've never seen him yet without a thick pocket-book fastened by a pad-lock."

"My dear," said Maurice Howell, when the Earl had departed, "I think you had better go and see Meg to-morrow. Tell her she and West will be welcomed here whenever they like to come. I don't know that she's been so very foolish after all."

The Earl was as good as his word. The detective already engaged in the case had no difficulty in procuring a warrant for the arrest of Frederic Rawson, alias James Walters, on a charge of fraud.

The Earl, accompanied by the detective and an officer in plain clothes, called at the office, and Lord Lorraine formally tendered the charge, namely, that Walters had falsely represented himself to be Fred Hawthorne Rawson, deceased, and had stolen and appropriated the property and effects of the late Walter Rawson, the said Frederic's father.

"It's all a plant," said the accused lightly. "Why, here's my father's clerk, who knew me boy and man for twelve years, ready to swear to my identity."

"Speak for yourself," said Maurice Howell, virtuously. "I can't help it if you've deceived me as well as other people. You can't be Fred Rawson, for his wife's in England, and ready to swear that her husband died in Australia two years ago."

"His wife! What, Barbara Hawthorne?"

"Mrs. Frederic Rawson," corrected the Earl, "my grandchild, and sole heiress. I'll trouble you, please Mr. Walters, for the papers you stole from my daughter Helen, papers she had treasured through years of suffering for her child's sake."

Walters gave up the fight.

"I did not steal them," he persisted; "when I took them I believed Barbara would shortly be my wife, and I thought I could take better care of them than she could. I knew your sons were dead, and that the penniless daughter of a gambler's broken-down wife must, if she survived her mother, be your heiress. I meant to share Combe Lorraine with Barbara, as king consort, but never to steal it from her."

"You'll find the law takes a different view of such offences," said Lord Lorraine. "Unless you want two indictments against you instead of one you had better hand over those papers."

"Won't you strike a single blow in my defence," asked Walters of his junior partner. "I have done enough for you, why do you forsake me now?"

"If it comes to that," said Howell, bitterly, "why, I've an account of my own against you. You'll end your days in a convict's prison. You tried your best to make my child a convict's wife."

CHAPTER VII.

"TEN years penal servitude!"

That was the verdict against James Walters, alias Fred Rawson; and when he heard it Maurice Howell felt thankful he had heeded Lord Lorraine's warning, and not taken his partner's cause.

On the whole things prospered far better with Howell than he deserved. As he expected Eric Milton declined to retain him in his office; but he settled on him an annuity of three hundred a year in consideration of his faithful services to his deceased uncle.

Eric was a rich man now. Walters' extravagance had not made a very great hole in old Mr. Rawson's fortune, any more than his neglect had been able to permanently injure the business. A few months of great care, and things would be as flourishing as ever. All would be with Eric as it had been up to the time of his uncle's death, save that Alice Seymour was another man's wife.

But Eric Milton wasted no regrets upon his false love of other days. His regard for her had died a sudden death the day he read her heartless letter of dismissal. He had never once regretted her since.

Eric still remained an inmate of Polgarth House, though Mrs. Mason told him, in his position he ought to set up an establishment of his own. He had let his uncle's house in Bedford Square at a long lease, and showed no hurry in choosing another; in fact, Mrs. Mason thought he seemed very little elated at his wonderful good fortune. He had seemed happier and more cheerful, she thought, before all he lost was restored to him.

The Earl of Lorraine, who had taken Barbara to his country seat (as soon as she was legally acknowledged to be his heiress), much to the discomfiture of her aunt Lucy, had his own suspicions as to the cause of young Milton's depression; and, finding all invitations to Combe Lorraine were decidedly, almost curtly, refused, he ran up to London just before Christmas, and simply insisted that Eric should spend that festival with him and Barbara.

"We owe everything to you," said the old nobleman; "but for you we should never have found each other. Bab can't make out how she has offended you that you scorn all her invitations."

"I don't scorn them, Lord Lorraine, but—it is not wise to run into danger."

"Oh, come; my poor old place is not so full of peril as that."

"You don't understand."

"I understand perfectly. If Bab had been the poor, friendless little girl she seemed, you would have asked her to marry you as soon as you came into your own again. Because she happens to be my grandchild you mean to break her heart."

"She does not know—she can't suspect."

"I can't tell what she suspects; but I know she doesn't look half so happy as she did when she lived at Polgarth House. I've had enough of match-making, Milton: it cost me my favourite child. Bab will be free to please herself. If she fancies you, and you fancy her, I don't see why you need go on avoiding us as if we were the plague."

"She is something more than your grandchild, Lord Lorraine."

"Oh, you mean she's my heiress. Well, I hope to live another twenty years; so she won't benefit by that at present; and, as every acre of land and every penny of money is entailed, you need not think of my property as anything but a provision for your eldest son. I liked you the first day I ever saw you; but I've had uncommonly hard thoughts of you lately, for it seemed to me you were bent on breaking my child's heart."

"You mean—don't play with me, Lord

Lorraine—it cuts too deep—You mean you would really give me Barbara?"

"If Barbara wished to be given—yes."

And the Earl went home to Combe Lorraine with the assurance to Barbara "that Mr. Milton would certainly be their guest for Christmas."

Mr. and Mrs. Algernon West never knew how nearly Meg's father had been implicated in the disgrace of James Walters; but they rejoiced warmly at the latter's discomfiture, and thought Mr. Milton's allowance a very liberal one. Maurice Howell did not seek another situation. He gave up the law, and took a very pretty cottage in a rural part of Hertfordshire, chiefly remarkable for being five miles from any town and six from a station. There were three acres of ground attached, and he went in for a cow, poultry, and early strawberries. Among these innocent delights he was probably happier than he had ever been before; but his wife found it a wee bit lonesome. She pined for the sound of the street cries, the whistle of the railway engines, and the muffled man's bell. At King's Walden you heard nothing and saw no one. The population was supposed to be a thousand, but it was possible to walk for three miles without meeting one of them. Mrs. Howell found it dreary in spite of blue sky and green fields; but she was a sensible woman, and not given to discontent; so no doubt in time she would grow reconciled to her rural home, and cease to sigh for the suburban delights of East Dulwich.

Mrs. Mason lost her favourite boarder in the spring. Eric Milton took a charming house at Kensington, furnished it with simple taste, and installed himself there early in April. Just six weeks later, on a Thursday in June, the bells of Combe Lorraine church chimed gaily for the wedding of the Earl's heiress. Orange blossoms and bridal veil were denied to Barbara on account of her widowhood. But as Eric walked down the aisle with his wife upon his arm, he thought all England could not have produced a lovelier bride than

HIS STRANGE CLIENT.

[THE END.]

THE Japanese camphor-tree is a monster evergreen of exceedingly symmetrical proportions and somewhat like a lime-tree. It has a red berry and its blossom is a white flower. Some of the trees are more than forty feet in circumference, and at least three hundred years old. Very little care was formerly bestowed upon the cultivation of these valuable trees, but all this has now been altered, and the result is that instead of having to wait until the tree is seventy or eighty years old before the camphor can be extracted, an equally good yield will be obtained in one-third of that time. The roots contain a much larger proportion of camphor than the trees; if the producers get ten pounds of crude camphor out of two hundred pounds of wood-chips, they regard it as a satisfactory yield.

THE rattlesnake has a pilot. The purpose of this pilot has never been satisfactorily explained, but it undoubtedly serves to protect him in some way. It is well known that the rattlesnake is a sluggish reptile, slow of movement and short-sighted. He can strike only to the distance of his own length, and is not of the constrictor species, fighting with his fangs. He is not, therefore, a dangerous adversary, and can be easily whipped by a black snake or any of the constrictor family. Even a dog can get the mastery over a rattlesnake without much danger of being injured. The pilot appears like a rattlesnake, except that he has no rattles and is somewhat darker in colour. He is also of much quicker movement, and when other reptiles or animals appear that possibly might prove dangerous to the rattler, the pilot, which is not so near-sighted as the rattlesnake, conducts the latter to a place of safety. Singularly, the pilot has received but scant attention except among the native people of the section where it is found, and but little is known about him. The only species of rattlesnake having the pilot for a guide is that found in the mountains; the prairie rattler has to look out for himself.

FACETIÆ.

POET: "What rhymes with 'altar'?" His wife (savagely): "Halter!"

OLD BACHELOR: "Do you expect to marry, or do you prefer to keep your liberty, Miss Stronge?" Miss Stronge: "I intend to do both."

HOVE GIRL: "Under the circumstances, what would you do if you were in my shoes?" Brighton Girl: "I am afraid I should lose myself."

MAMMA: "Why don't you marry Mr. Bilson? He's a man in ten thousand." Mabel: "Oh, yes; but I'm looking for ten thousand in the man."

GAME DEALER: "Sorry we're quite sold out of game. Try some of our famous sausages?" Sportsman: "Oh, hang it all, man, I can't shoot sausages."

CLARA: "What are you reading now?" Dora: "Historical novels." "Do you like them?" "Yes, indeed. There is so much I can skip."

ETHEL: "Yes, I'll accept him if he proposes. But don't tell him, Maud." "Of course not. I don't want to put a stumbling-block in the way of his proposing."

ACTOR: "When I am acting I forget everything about me; I see nothing but my rôle; the public disappears entirely." Friend: "I don't wonder at that."

"SCRIBBLES, the author, has committed suicide." "Why?" "He fell in love with the heroine of his last novel, and killed himself because she married the hero."

"Is the mistress of the house in?" inquired the pedlar. "No," replied the tired-looking, timid woman who had gone to the kitchen door to answer the knock. "It's her afternoon out."

EXTRACT from a bride's letter of thanks: "Your beautiful clock was received, and is now in the drawing-room on the mantelpiece, where we hope to see you often."

BONNIE: "I say, doctor, what's this swelling at the back of my neck?" Doctor: "Oh, it's nothing serious, but I should advise you to keep your eye on it."

"Your proposal is really so unexpected, Mr. Sixtyfive, that—that you must give me time," Elderly Lover: "Time, Miss Rebecca? Do you think there is any to spare?"

AT THE MUSICAL.—First Lady Friend: "Oh, my dear, I had so much to say to you, and the pianist has finished." Second Lady Friend: "I'm dying to hear it. Let's encore him."

"I SUPPOSE Count Bogus has been accustomed to having everything of the best about him?" "Of course, dear; you see he was head waiter in one of the leading hotels for years."

MRS. DICK: "How do you like your new servant?" Mrs. TOM: "I don't like her at all. She won't do." Mrs. DICK: "Won't do!" Mrs. TOM: "No; she won't do anything."

SWELLINGTON (at the soirée): "I wonder if that plain woman over there is really trying to flirt with me?" Cooler (politely): "I can easily find out, sir, by asking. She's my wife."

"I EAT," remarked the first gentleman of the long-fingered profession to his friend, as he admired the other's timekeeper, "what price did you pay for that watch?" "Six months' hard!"

When he visited the cemetery, Mike Donovan noticed on a tombstone the following inscription: "Sacred to the memory of a lawyer and an honest man." "By the powers," said Mike "that's a strange custom to bury two men in one grave!"

KATHLEEN (the servant): "Yez gev me this bottle of—phat's the nem av it?—jockey club, this mar-ruin, ma'am." Her mistress: "I did. Don't you like it?" Kathleen: "I do not, ma'am. I tuk about a wineglassful av it wid sugar an' hot wather, an' it's lift a taste in me mouth wud sbpoil eggs!"

TRAMP (piteously): "Please help a poor cripple!" Kind old gentleman (handing him some money): "Bless me! In what way are you crippled, my poor fellow?" Tramp (pocketing the money): "Financially, sir."

YOUNG HUSBAND: "What a peculiar flavour this stewed steak has." Young Wife (diffidently): "I really cannot account for it. Indeed, in order to take away the bad taste of the onions, I scalded them myself in Eau de Cologne."

MR. NEWFOP: "Kostique called at my house last night. He said our new baby looked just like me." Absent-minded Friend: "That's Kostique all over. He's always making unkind remarks."

"JACK has finished my portrait." "At last! I didn't think he ever would." "Oh, yes! He's been at work on it only a year." "Dear me! Isn't that a long time!" "We didn't think so. We're engaged now."

MRS. DE FASHION: "How do you like my new hat?" Mr. De Fashion: "Pretty well; but there's one thing lacking." Mrs. De Fashion: "What is that, pray?" Mr. De Fashion: "The money to pay for it."

"THOSE birds flying over yonder are aquatic birds, I suppose!" asked the young man in a seal-brown suit of the captain of the steamer. "No, they ain't," was the scornful reply. "They is ducks."

PAT has offered his school-fellow a bite from his apple, and is astonished at the large piece measured off by Mike's teeth. "Here, I say; hold on there, hold on!" Then correcting himself: "When I say 'hold on,' I mean let go!"

SHE: "That was a lovely engagement-ring you gave me last night, dear; but what do those initials, E. C., mean on the inside?" He: "Why—er—that is—don't you know that's the new way of stamping eighteen carat?"

FANNY: "You take Dick Foster too seriously. Nothing he says is worth a moment's consideration." Nanny: "But he insinuated that I was one of the mushroom aristocracy." "Humph! He hasn't sense enough to tell a mushroom from a toad stool."

A VERY interesting pianist, when sitting next to Colonel Ramollot at the dinner-table, asked him, in a winning tone of voice, "Are you fond of music, colonel?" "Madam," replied the warrior, rolling a savage pair of eyes, "I am not afraid of it."

"Don't you think, love," said a newly-married man to his wife, "if I were to smoke it would spoil the curtains?" "Ah, you are really the most unselfish and thoughtful husband to be found anywhere. Certainly it would." "Well, then, take the curtains down."

PROFESSOR B. said: "When I married, I married the youngest of eleven children. I hadn't been married an hour before I found that in order to get along with any sort of tranquillity, harmony, or peace, one of us would have to give in. I hadn't been married two hours before I found it was I."

MRS. GRUMPS: "I s'pose you'll fix your will so that I won't get a penny if I marry again. You're just mean enough." Mr. Grumps: "No, my dear. I have merely inserted a wish that if you marry again it shall be to Mr. John Jimson. He and I were boys together. He liked me once."

MRS. HYFLYE: "George, dear, while you are having money troubles I ought to tell you that I learned to-day why your rival Soapem's credit has suddenly become so good." Mr. Hyflye: "Why?" Mrs. Hyflye: "I overheard someone remark that Soapem's finances must be all right, because his wife was wearing such elegant new hats and dresses."

A LITTLE girl who made too much noise in the early morning in her sick mother's room, was put out into the hall, and soon after a miserable rag doll, of which she was very fond, was tossed out to her. This was the last straw. Snatching up her beloved, and hugging it tightly in her arms, with streaming eyes she sobbed out to her grandmother, "I wouldn't a' 'tared, but what had Judy done?"

"Yes," said Gussie, indignantly; "I can candidly say that no woman evah thanked me for giving her a seat in an omnibus." "But," said the young woman, "did you ever offer a seat to a lady in an omnibus?" And Gussie mused, and murmured that that phase of the question had not occurred to him.

YOUNG HUMORIST (to the editor): "Have you looked over the comic sketches I left with you?" Editor: "I have." Y. H.: "They ain't as good as I might do if I hadn't so many other irons in the fire." Editor (handing back the manuscript): "Here they are, and I advise you—" Y. H.: "What?" Editor: "Put them with the other irons."

BOBBY was spending the afternoon at his aunt's, and for some moments had been gazing out of the window in a painfully thoughtful sort of way. "What makes you so serious, Bobby?" asked his aunt. "Why, ma told me that I must remember not to ask for anything to eat, and I'm trying to remember it."

MRS. SURGOES: "Henry, you have kept us waiting dinner a long time. What detained you?" Mr. Subbuba: "Business. Couldn't get away any sooner. Looks like snow, doesn't it?" "Yes. What was the nature of the business?" "Public matters that wouldn't interest you. The beef looks nice, doesn't it?" "Yes, the beef is all right. What were the public matters?" "Tremendous crowd in front of a tall office building. I got right in the thick of it and couldn't get away. You had a headache when I left for town this morning. Is it better?" "Yes, the headache is all gone. What—" "How about the people next door? Have they left for the country yet?" "Yes. They left about twelve. What was the crowd doing?" "Why—why—why, it was—it was watching some men raise a safe to a sixth-story window. You're very inquisitive, dear."

"How will you have your hair cut, sir?" said the talkative hairdresser to the man in the chair. "Minus conversational prolixity," replied the patient. "How's that, sir?" "With abbreviated or totally eliminated narrations." "I—er—don't quite catch your meaning, sir." "With quiescent mandibulars." "Which?" "Without effervescent verbosity." "Sir?" "Let diminutive colloquy be conspicuous by its absence." The hairdresser scratched his head thoughtfully for a second, and then went over to the proprietor of the shop, with the whispered remark: "I don't know whether that gentleman in my chair is mad or a foreigner, but I can't find out what he wants." The proprietor went to the waiting customer, and said, politely: "My man doesn't seem to understand you, sir. How would you like your hair cut?" "In silence." The proprietor gave a withering look at his journeyman, while the latter began work, and felt so utterly crushed that he never even asked his patient if he'd buy a bottle of hair restorer.

WHEN he went home the other evening he laid his overcoat down in the hall, and there his wife found it, and availing herself of her privileges, she went through the pockets and came out with a small box. She gazed at it a minute and went after him. "Here," she exclaimed, "what does this mean?" "My dear—" he began. "Don't 'my dear' me," she raved; "what I want to know is what you are carrying this box marked 'Ribbon for the typewriter' for?" He began to explain again. "Don't talk to me," she screamed; "I know all. You've got this gessaw for that hussey of a typewriter in your office, and will no doubt give it to her to wear at some of her society affairs and you'll probably be trying to slip out some evening to see her there; but you shan't do it, for I'll go down in the morning and settle her once for all, so I will," and she began to sob. He took it out of her hands and opened it. "Look at it, my dear," he said with a tender smile. She made a wild grab for it, and as the ink string left its imprint on her face and hands she collapsed and forgave him.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen of Greece is president of a sisterhood devoted to the reformation of criminals, and she personally visits prisoners.

THE Queen is, according to present arrangements, to visit Aldershot on the 28th of this month, and her Majesty will then inspect the Division under the Duke of Connaught's command.

THE Princess of Wales will be about socially to a considerable extent during the season, and will most likely attend the State balls, but it is believed that H.R.H. will not dance or be present at private dances.

NEARLY all the monarchs of Europe have their lives insured. The most notable exception is the Russian Emperor. The companies would not insure him, regarding his chances of long life extremely hazardous.

THE young Queen of Holland is taught to spare no pains in popularising herself with the people, and it need therefore scarcely be added that a portrait of her in the national costume which was taken recently is having a great vogue amongst her loyal subjects, to whom the girl Queen is an object of quite shivarious affection.

THEIR was despatched to Coburg by order of the Queen, some sprigs of myrtle from a large plant in the grounds at Osborne, for the bridal bouquet of the Princess Victoria Melita. This plant has grown from a piece of myrtle which was in the bouquet of the Empress Frederick on the day of her marriage. It has been a rule in the Royal family that each bride is to have a piece of it on her wedding-day. The sprigs were placed in the centre of a bouquet of white flowers which the Princess carried during the ceremony and at the subsequent luncheon and reception.

THE Queen and the German Emperor can both laugh heartily on occasions; but more at simple fun than ill-natured satire. Both are quick at sympathising with folk in trouble; and though Royal and Imperial messages of condolence may sometimes appear strangely worded, with the crowned saviour's own importance a little too much in evidence, yet genuine kindness shows through all, and is unmistakably appreciated. A frightful accident shocks nobody more than our Queen and the German Emperor.

THE Duchess of Saxe-Coburg wore a befittingly splendid costume. It is a cyclamen-coloured mink velvet deliciously embroidered. Her two youngest daughters were not bridesmaids, but their get-up was very elegant, as became the occasion, nevertheless; Princess Alexandra is in her sixteenth year now, so her toilet was more "grown-up" than that of little Princess Beatrice. Her Royal Highness wore a robe of pink Valkyrie brocade in small floral stripes, blue alternating with pink of a deeper tone; it had a low bodice and puffed sleeves arranged in a pretty girlish fashion with pink and white chiffon. Then there was a little olive-coloured cape of mink velvet to be worn as a wrap, with a delicate tone of pink shot with the grey, and a bordering of lace-work in a point d'Alençon stitch; the cape had a high collar with grey ostrich feathers round the throat and a lining of plush pink satin. Princess Beatrice had her little cape for the shoulders too; it and the dress were all in *rouge*, a cream-coloured bengaline, with low bodice and short sleeves, caught and draped with a sash to match, the puffs of the sleeves and the short skirt being trimmed with lace.

THE nuptial costume of Princess Victoria Melita was of a thick, rich, corded silk, with pearl embroidery in large medallions, with sprays branching outward on the front of the skirt and round the hem. Above this line of embroidery (which is in a pattern of sprays of orange-blossom and true lovers' knots) was a trail of orange-blossoms. The pearl embroidery appears on the low bodice also, and there is a frilled collar of net similarly worked, and epaulettes of it to match, white net frills, with pearl edging finish the sleeves. A veil of rare old point lace and a wreath of orange-blossoms completed the toilette.

STATISTICS.

THE theatres of London will seat 60,000 people.

THE Spanish army includes altogether 26,400 officers or one officer to every eight soldiers.

IN the Crimean war 1855, 309,400 men went to the front, of whom 8,490 were killed in battle, 39,870 were wounded, of whom 11,750 died in the hospital, 75,375 died of diseases contracted during the campaign. The total deaths were 95,615. The war cost £305,000,000.

RETURNS just made to Parliament of accidents to railway employes in Great Britain show that the percentage in proportion to the number of persons employed steadily decreased, with one slight exception, from the year 1873 to 1888; but there was an increase again during 1889, 1890, and 1891, and again a decrease in 1892.

GEMS.

A MAN's conduct is an unspoken sermon.

THE honest poor are no scarcer than the honest rich.

OUR greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

ADVERSITY is the trial of principle. Without it a man hardly knows whether he is honest or not.

THE gifted man is he who sees the essential point. Intellect altogether expresses itself in this power of discerning; and how much of morality is in the kind of insight we get of anything!

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PLAIN CAKE.—One egg, one-third cup of butter, one cup of milk, one cup of sugar, two teaspoonfuls of cream of tartar in two and one-half cups of flour, teaspoonful of soda dissolved in the milk. Bake about half an hour.

POTATOES FRID WHOLE.—Take small, cold boiled potatoes, dip them in beaten egg, and roll in fine bread crumbs; repeat the operation, and fry a golden brown in boiling lard. This makes a nice dish for breakfast or luncheon.

HARD GINGERBREAD.—One cupful of sugar, one of butter, one third of a cupful of molasses, half a cupful of sour milk or cream, one teaspoonful of saleratus, one tablespoonful of ginger, flour enough to roll. Roll thin, cut in oblong pieces, and bake quickly. Care must be taken that too much flour is not mixed in with the dough. All kinds of cakes that are rolled should have no more flour than is absolutely necessary to work them.

PARKINS.—Quarter pound flour, quarter pound oatmeal, quarter pound treacle, one teaspoonful ginger, one ounce lard, one ounce sugar, half teaspoonful of carbonate of soda. Melt the treacle and the lard together; mix all the dry ingredients together, and stir in the melted treacle and lard; mix with a spoon, it will then be all moistened. Take up a little bit of the mixture, roll it into a ball and flatten it, put it on a greased oven shelf; put the half of an almond in the middle of it; repeat till all are done, and put in the oven to bake for about ten minutes.

GERMAN BISCUITS.—Half pound flour, quarter pound butter, quarter pound fine sugar, half teaspoon cinnamon, one egg, and mix the flour, butter, sugar and cinnamon well together then make all into a fine paste with the egg, roll out quite thinly, and cut with a round cutter, bake, and when cool spread with jam and stick two together, then ice over. Half a pound of icing sugar, two tablespoonfuls of water, a few drops of lemon juice, just heat this over the fire, and pour over the biscuits very neatly. You should have just enough water barely to wet the sugar.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Queen has not worn her crown more than twenty times during her whole reign.

BAYONETS were invented by a Basque regiment during a battle near Bayonne. Their ammunition had given out, and in despair they fixed their knives on the end of their guns to resist a charge.

RUSSIA has few stranded actors. When a manager takes a troupe on tour, he is required to deposit a sum of money with the Government to pay the travelling expenses home for the members in case they become stranded.

THE blue uniforms of the Austrian army are to be abolished, and a sober grey substituted. This is the decision of a committee of experts appointed to investigate and settle the question of the best colour for soldiers' clothes.

M. DUFOUR, a French savant, declares that fishes can talk. They can, he asserts, produce certain sounds at will by the vibration of certain specially designed muscles. These vibrations are caused by a little air bladder, which is alternately distended and exhausted.

AMONG the novelties in electric lighting is a reporter's pencil with an electric light at the tip. This little device is convenient, in that it gives sufficient light to enable the owner to take notes at any time or place without need of lamp or candle.

PUTTING the cart before the horse is no longer a mere conception. In France it is now an accomplished fact. An inventor has got up a street-car or omnibus not drawn but driven with gearing from a treadmill attached to the rear of the vehicle and supported on wheels. The horses, therefore, rides while he works.

THE pearl oyster is not in any way like the oysters which we eat. It is of an entirely different species, and as a matter of fact the shells of the so-called pearl oyster are of far more value to those engaged in "pearl fishing" than the pearls. There are extensive pearl fisheries in the Gulf of California, and some of the finest pearls have been taken from these waters.

HOT milk is a recognised drink in some of the German cafes. It is served in a cup with a saucer, and two lumps of sugar always accompany it. The drink has several things to commend it, since it has none of the dangerous qualities of tea, coffee, or alcoholic drinks, and is declared by the doctors to be an excellent remedy for disorders of the stomach arising from certain forms of indigestion.

THE greater part of the desert of Sahara is, it has been ascertained, from 6,000 to 2,000 feet above the level of the ocean. The desert is not rainless, but showers cover it with grass for a few weeks every year, large flocks and herds being maintained upon its borders, and the oases are depressions in which water can be collected and stored. It was at one time believed that the whole of the desert was below the sea level, instead of only a comparatively small part of it.

A CHINESE prison is called a "cangue." Its outer door is barred with bamboo and is guarded by petty soldiers or policemen. The cangue contains two rooms and two yards. One room and one yard are for men. The other room and one yard are for women. The space set apart for women is very much smaller than that for men. But the women's quarters and the men's quarters are alike in being entirely devoid of any provision for personal comfort or decency.

FIRE under water may be produced by placing some small pieces of phosphorus in a conical-shaped glass tumbler, and then covering them with the crystals of chloride of potash. Next fill the glass with water and then add a few drops of sulphuric acid—the acid to be applied directly to the phosphorus and potash crystals by means of a long tube. If the experiment is properly carried out tongues of bright red flame can be seen flashing up through the water, the intense chemical heat produced by the action of the sulphuric acid on the potash and phosphorus being sufficient to inflame the latter, although entirely covered with water.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

TIBBIE.—Letter goes in fourteen days.

JOKY.—Sponge out with diluted benzine.

CROSSY.—Ask at the Inland Revenue office.

A. C.—Pedlar's license, 5s., got from police.

READER.—Any bookseller will obtain it for you.

ANXIOUS ANNIE.—The lawyer will tell you the cost.

QUILP.—At any shop where the instruments are sold.

WILLIE.—The stamp cannot be detached or used again.

CONTEMPERARY.—Tay Bridge fell on Sunday, December 28th, 1879.

IGNORANT READER.—The "a" in patent is sounded as in fate.

M. T.—Wet it with soap-suds and lay it in the hot sun.

WORRIED.—You must ask a lawyer to advise and to act for you.

MARK.—Apply to a police magistrate for a maintenance order.

AUNTIE.—You can will it to whomsoever you may think fit.

SAM WELLS.—It is a matter of arrangement between buyer and seller.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Ascertain rule hitherto in force in the office where you are.

TWO G.—Yes, if the mother becomes chargeable to the parish.

F. M. S.—Forms for such agreements may be had at most stationers' shops.

CLARE.—Punctuation was first used in literature in the year 1520.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—An employer cannot be compelled to give a servant a character.

PAT.—We are not able to guide you in a matter under Irish law.

YOUR MOTHER.—Child's birth can be registered only in district where it takes place.

B. E.—The Church of England does not receive any grant from the State.

CURIO.—Either advertise or take it to some dealer. It is not worth much.

BRIDAL.—We cannot undertake to advise on questions of marriage etiquette.

HOWARD.—Eranice comes from the Greek, meaning the one who brings victory.

C. R. W.—Write to Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W.

JONATHAN'S LOVE.—Jonathan was a Jewish name meaning the gift of the Lord.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—The voyage from Britain to India is made in thirteen days by the big steamers.

MA BELLE.—Mabel a favourite Latin and French name, means lovable.

IMPETUOUS.—Brother cannot by law be made to pay one penny, towards maintenance of sister.

DISTRESS.—The marks in the face will gradually disappear without remedial treatment of any kind.

DICK WARTINGTON.—There is a Lord Mayor of London, York, Liverpool, and Manchester.

SPRING.—Spring, 10th March; summer 21st June; autumn 23rd September; winter 21st December.

N. G.—No part of a wife's or daughter's earnings can be taken for a husband's or father's debts.

ROUGH HANDS.—Glycerine mixed with a little fresh lemon juice will soften and whiten the skin.

MONTAGUE.—If there are no children, husband and wife's relatives each take half of all she possessed.

VERA.—A fish has no feeling in its fins. You can do nothing to assist the broken tail.

CLAIRE.—The "At Home" cards should be sent out immediately subsequent to the wedding.

NEIGHBOUR.—You may be required to remove the fowls if they constitute a nuisance to your neighbours.

TATTERS.—If the dog is kept on your premises you must take out a license in your own name.

TROUBLED MOTHER.—The father must be present to give consent to the registration of infant in his name.

INDIGNANT ONE.—A clergyman may legally refuse to bury a non-parishioner in the parish graveyard.

INQUIRER.—You require to make good any damage done to your neighbour in raising your walls.

A LOVE.—OF THE "LONDON READER."—State your desire to your family doctor, and be guided by his recommendation.

T. W.—Sponge with diluted benzine, taking the excess off on blotting paper, after which sponge with plain water, also removing excess moisture with blotting paper.

PELICIA.—Wash rice. Put it in plenty of boiling water with a little salt. Let it boil ten minutes, never stir, then drain and steam with the lid on quarter of an hour. Remember always to wash rice well.

OSCAR.—Calamus root has been used instead of tobacco by those who wished to discontinue chewing, and with success.

ANXIOUS TO LEARN.—You would require personal instructions. It is an art not to be taught in a paragraph.

L. T.—You have no legal right to sell a lodger's goods for arrears of rent, but you may detain the goods as security.

EMME.—Eyebrows and eyelashes that are thin can, it is said, be improved considerably by rubbing every night with vaseline.

FAMILY MENDER.—Cotton thread is generally used to sew kid gloves, as it does not so readily out the kid as silk thread.

HUX.—Sneezing can be averted by pressing the upper lip against the teeth with the forefinger when the inclination will vanish.

BOOKWORM.—A bookseller in your own town will probably be able to supply you with catalogues containing the information desired.

BAD MANNERS.—There are only two rules for good manners. One is, always think of others; the other is, never think of yourself.

CITIZEN.—The theory of law is that every law-abiding man in the country is bound to give his services gratis to assist in bringing criminals to justice.

CAREFUL MAN.—Applied to shoes, glycerine is a great preservative of the leather, and effectually keeps out the water and prevents wet feet.

HAIR.—The word hairbreadth, now used for an infinitesimal space, was once a regular measure. It was the width of sixteen hairs laid side by side.

JO-JO.—The tallest trees in the world grow in Australia. They are a species of marah gum, and some are said to exceed three hundred feet in height.

MICHIE.

A little girl stood at the window
Of a house that was large and grand,
And watched with a look of great longing
A little girl play in the sand.
"I'd give my new doll just from Paris,
With real curls and long silken skirt,
My books, my mamma and my brother—
If I could just play in the dirt!"

The poor little girl that was playing
Looked up at the house grand and fine,
"I wish that for only one hour
That beautiful home could be mine!
I would dress in silk of the finest,
With my face clean and hair very neat,
And look out and feel oh, so sorry,
For the poor little girl in the street!"

Oh, green are the fields in the distance,
And white are the clouds in the sky,
And flowers that bloom high above us
Are the flowers for which we ever sigh.
Oh, poor without doubt are the rich ones
When wealth brings no comfort and rest,
And rich without doubt are the poor ones,
When their life as it is seems best.

K. O. B.

PURCHASER.—If a sale is arranged the purchaser is justified in refusing to pay more than the ticketed price; but if the shopkeeper desires more he may refuse to sell.

MILLIE.—A cream made up of magnesia and water lightly dabbed on over it, allowed to dry perfectly and then brushed up carefully with a clean soft-haired brush.

YOUR MOTHER.—The "French grey" paint you suggest would depend on the colouring and style of the room, and without a knowledge of that we are powerless to advise.

LADY JANE.—To clean gilding, remove all dust with a soft brush; then wash the gilding lightly and rapidly with warm water in which an onion has been boiled. Dry by rubbing with soft cloths.

SEEKER AFTER KNOWLEDGE.—The greatest bell in the world—if we exclude one which has broken at Moscow, and is estimated to weigh 143,772 pounds, and was never hung—is that, also at Moscow, weighing 141,000 pounds.

C. A. T.—We know nothing better than warm water and soap to cleanse it. Brush in about the carving, and then dry well and rub up. A little polish at the last may be used, but good rubbing-up is the clearest.

WASH TUB.—In rinsing use water slightly warm; the clothes will look better, you will not take a chill, and your hands will not be injured in appearance beyond the reach of glycerine and rose-water.

IS A FLIGHT.—Certainly the damage appears to be very slight and ought not to necessitate the purchase of a new mirror. Were it a total break, so that the glass was entirely destroyed, it would, of course, be right for you to replace it; but as it is, you should merely be held for the damages.

A VICTIM.—A successful method of curing a cold in the head consists in inhaling through the nose the emanations of ammoniac contained in a smelling-bottle. If the sense of smell be not acute, the bottle should be kept under the nose until the pungency of its contents has had the desired effect.

W. W.—To remove dandruff, a solution of powdered borax and tepid water is generally used. Wash the head thoroughly with it. If it leaves the hair too dry, apply a little vaseline, and rub it well into the roots of the hair.

SMOOTHFACE.—If persistent shaving of your lips, chin, and cheeks does not produce moustache, whiskers, and beard, nothing will; in that case you come of a hairless family, and have inherited your smooth skin from your parents or their parents.

ORANGE BLOSSOM.—If you wish to be married at church you must have the banns published three consecutive Sundays in the church of the parish in which you live. If you wish to be married at a district registrar's office you must give twenty-one days' notice.

SCOT.—Gaelic is far older than books—that is to say, it existed as a spoken language for hundreds of years before it began to be written or printed; the oldest natural objects in the country—hills, mountains, and rivers—have all Gaelic names.

PERPLEXITY.—Glycerine is a sweetish liquid, without colour or smell, and is obtained from various fats and oils. When mixed with nitric and sulphuric acid glycerine becomes the explosive compound called nitro-glycerine which is much stronger than gunpowder.

BLUE-EYED BEAN.—To represent music have the words and notes of songs printed on some length of cloth and make them up into a dress. Wear a guitar or mandolin with a ribbon, some castanets and a harmonica at the belt, and a few's harp mounted as a pin in the hair.

X. Y. Z.—Plenty of powdered borax scattered freely where they congregate, and forced into cracks and crevices where they are known to hide, if persevered in will finally rid you of them, but none of the remedies without perseverance will be of any avail.

GRAN.—It should be thoroughly washed with hot water and soap before using, and then boil some water in them for a short time, and pour it away; they will be then fit for use. A handful of hay boiled in a new pot is a good thing, and then boil water in it for half an hour.

UNEMPLOYED.—Short-hand and typewriting are quite overdone, unless the operator is an expert, in which case there is an excellent opportunity for good workers. Telegraphy is subject to very much the same criticism. Expert operators who are steady and reliable are rarely idle.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—The Glencoe massacre, which has made the valley historically famous, was the putting to death of the Macdonald tribe, in Scotland, for not surrendering before the time stated in King William's proclamation, December 31, 1691. A decree had been obtained to exterminate the tribe, which the King is said to have signed without reading it. The massacre began on February 13th, 1692. About sixty men were slain, and many women and children, their wives and offspring, were turned out of their homes, and died of cold and hunger. No punishment ever followed the atrocity.

GENTLE.—To make coffee-custard, take a large cup of fresh ground coffee, break an egg into it, mix it up well; put it into a coffee-pot with a pint of boiling water. Boil it five minutes, add a cup of cold water, and let it stand ten minutes. Turn it off very clear into a saucepan, add a pint of cream, and give it one boil. Have ready eight eggs well beaten, one and a half large cupfuls of sugar; turn the coffee and cream boiling hot on the eggs, stirring all the while. Put the custard into a pitcher, set it into boiling water, and stir it all the time until it thickens. Serve in cups to eat cold.

BELLA.—A good receipt for boiling a turkey is the following: Stuff the turkey as for roasting. A very nice dressing is made by chopping half a pint of oysters and mixing them with bread-crumbs, butter, pepper, and salt, thyme or sweet marjoram, and wet with milk or water. Baste about the turkey a thin cloth, the inside of which has been dredged with flour, and put it to boil in cold water with a spoonful of salt in it. Let a large turkey simmer for two and a half or three hours. Skim it while boiling. Serve with oyster sauce, made by adding to a cupful of the liquor in which the turkey was boiled the same quantity of milk and eight oysters chopped fine. Season with minced parsley; stir in a spoonful of rice or wheat flour wet with cold milk, and add a teaspoonful of butter. Boil up once and pour into a tureen.

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